

ASSESSING THE DISCIPLINE:  
ALIGNING CURRICULAR STRUCTURES AND STUDENT LEARNING  
WITH DISCIPLINARY GOALS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

By Katie Desmond

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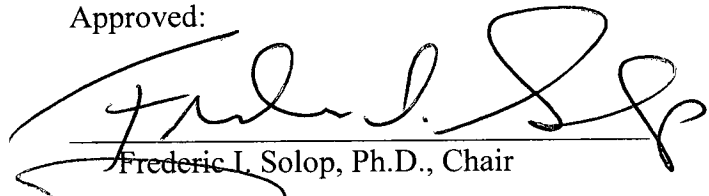
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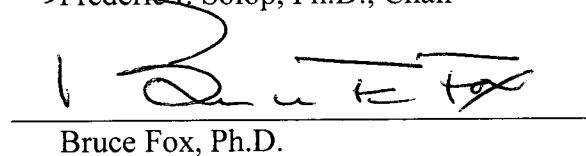
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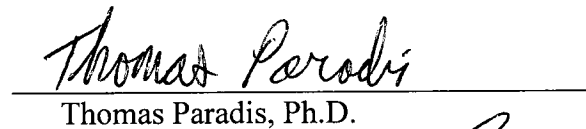
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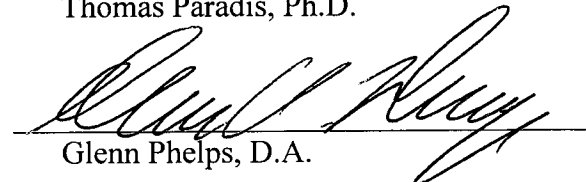
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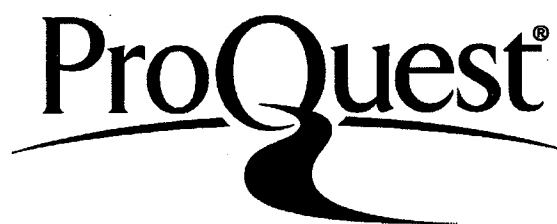
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## ABSTRACT

### ASSESSING THE DISCIPLINE: ALIGNING CURRICULAR STRUCTURES AND STUDENT LEARNING WITH DISCIPLINARY GOALS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

KATIE DESMOND

Four identifiable disciplinary goals can be discerned from the development of political science as a discipline. These goals indicate that political science students will (1) attain knowledge about political systems (national and international); (2) gain an understanding of how politics works; (3) develop critical thinking skills; and, (4) learn to be “good citizens” (or the idea of “education for citizenship”) through civic education. Assessing the presence of these goals in political science curriculum and student learning affords the discipline an opportunity to participate in renewed conversations about teaching and learning in higher education, to extol its strengths as a discipline, and to contribute to assessment processes.

This research uses content analysis and survey research methodologies to examine curricular alignment to disciplinary goals. The study analyzes curricula from 41 political science departments chosen from a query of Carnegie Foundation’s classification of higher education institutions. The study also includes an in depth case study of curricular strategies employed by one institution. While looking at the relationship between student learning alignment and disciplinary goals, this research

utilizes a quasi-experimental methodology involving a survey of political science students at a variety of education institutions.

This study shows that political science curriculum and student learning is most strongly aligned to the first three disciplinary goals and less aligned to the fourth disciplinary goal. Political science students are often directed through courses that establish foundational knowledge of politics and political systems/processes. Student attainment of knowledge of politics and political systems/process is evident in the survey results. Political science curriculum often emphasizes critical thinking, confirmed by student reporting of their political science coursework experience. Civic education appears less frequently in the stated goals of political science courses, and political science departments. Despite the interest in civic education as a student learning goal, the infrequency of this goal in political science curriculum and student learning is noteworthy.

This study concludes by recommending that political science educators further engage in conversations about the goals of their discipline. This conversation can contribute to greater self-examination, change, and disciplinary revitalization. It can also strengthen the effectiveness of political science departments in educating students.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of the support of my family through the years of my academic pursuits. My husband Paul took on the bulk of parenting responsibilities during my work on this dissertation. You are an amazing father and my best friend. I love sharing intellectual exploration with you. My sons, Aiden and Reilly are my inspiration and joy. My love for you is eternal.

I am forever grateful to my colleagues at Feather River College who pushed me to the finish. I am blessed with many friends in Chico, Flagstaff, and Quincy who have always supported me with unwavering love and camaraderie.

This dissertation reflects my dedication to teaching, a vocation I've chosen because of the many extraordinary professors I have encountered in graduate school. I would like to thank Dr. Glenn Phelps who showed me a passion for teaching political science through the way he connects with undergraduate students. I am honored to have such a wonderful teacher on my dissertation committee. I would like to also extend my thanks to Dr. Bruce Fox who is a wonderful listener, scholar and teacher. The conversations we've had about critical thinking and general education compelled me to take this direction in my research. I am thankful for the mentoring and guidance of Dr. Thomas Paradis who shared with me his expertise of academic assessment and I am grateful for his guidance on this dissertation. I also owe deep thanks to the remarkable teachers who guided me through tremendous intellectual growth and life changing experiences: Dr. Sheryl Lutjens, Dr. Geeta Chowdhry, and Dr. MaryAnn Steger from the Department of Politics and International Affairs, Dr. Susan Deeds in History, and Dr. Doug Brown in Economics.

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To Aiden and Reilly who inspire  
me to be a better teacher and person.

To Paul whose patience amazes me.

To my parents who devoted their lives to education.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

“I just think everything we do ought to be open to scrutiny.”

-- Martha J. Kanter, Under Secretary,  
U.S. Department of Education<sup>1</sup>

“The way to a faculty member’s head is through the discipline... It is love for and expertise in the discipline that (faculty) hope to cultivate in their students.”

-- Barbara D. Wright (2007, 7)<sup>2</sup>

### Statement of Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

In January 2010, Department of Education Under Secretary Martha J. Kanter explained to the Council on Higher Education that institutions undergoing accreditation and their accrediting bodies need to focus more on “outputs” rather than “inputs.” According to the *Chronicle on Higher Education*, Kanter’s concern is that accreditation is not focusing enough on “what they [students] have learned” (Kelderman 2010). The Department of Education is directing higher education toward more accountability. Higher education professionals are being called upon to demonstrate what students are learning and where this learning is falling short. Processes to demonstrate student outputs are being tested at the institutional, program

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from an interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 26, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> “The Way to a Faculty Member’s Head Is through the Discipline.” In *Hallmarks of Effective Outcomes Assessment*

and course levels. But at the level of the discipline, there is little documentation of what students are learning.

This poses a provocative challenge for the discipline of political science. It is an opportunity to strengthen its disciplinary identity, improving the practice of political science education. In keeping with this challenge, the goals of this dissertation research are as follows:

- Identify definitive disciplinary goals of political science.
- Examine the extent to which these goals are reflected in political science curriculum.
- Assess whether student learning aligns with these disciplinary goals.

This research assumes that it is desirable to have the disciplinary goals of political science drive student learning.

The following research questions run throughout this dissertation:

1. To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curriculum of political science?
2. To what extent is science student learning aligned with the goals of political science?

Teaching and learning are fundamental practices in higher education; practitioners teach and students, hopefully, learn. Yet conversations about teaching and learning tend to only take place at the peripheries of disciplines. This is especially true in political science. This dissertation addresses the absence of a structured, discipline level conversation about what is being taught and what students are learning in political science. This dissertation strives to bring this conversation to the

foreground of the discipline. Discourse and debate have driven the evolution of political science since its inception, yet the discipline has failed so far to discuss the goals of political science itself. To do so strengthens the discipline's central purpose and practice: education.

Institutions of higher education in the United States are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching college and university students. Like educators from the primary and secondary levels of education, higher education professionals across the fields of study are examining questions about student learning outcomes that include: what should students be learning? are students learning? and, are students learning what educators think they should be learning? According to Cashin and Downey (1995) "many disciplines focus on the acquisition of knowledge" (Donald 2002) placing disciplinary content as the focus of learning goals. In addition to content specific acquisition, student learning outcomes may also reflect the learning of specific skills such as reading, writing, oral communication, or critical thinking. Teachers assign readings, multiple choice tests, essay exams, research papers, case study analysis, or service learning activities to assess student learning of the course content and/or skills. Assessment results provide information about whether students are meeting student learning outcomes established for specific courses. These results are intended to provide educators with information for course and program level improvement. Student learning information is required for public institutions to demonstrate their fulfillment of educational responsibility.

No areas or persons working within the halls of U.S. public, higher education institutions should be immune from being accountable for the responsibilities that

come with educating students. Evidence of student learning is best measured when the learning goals are clearly articulated. Student learning goals can be found in college and university mission statements. Academic programs and departments also develop their own student learning goals and outcomes. Instructors decide what learning outcomes address their course objectives. At a macro level, however, few disciplines have established student learning outcomes with the exception of those held to accreditation reporting. As Banta (2007) explains, disciplines subject to external accreditation have developed goals and levels of student competence that are assessed across the discipline (e.g., nursing and health sciences) (1-6). These disciplines have developed assessment mechanisms that show the alignment of student learning and competence in the field, thus meeting expectations of the accrediting body. Banta notes that some academic disciplines not subject to similar accreditation oversight are assigning and assessing student learning in end of program portfolios or capstone projects (2007, 5). Clearly defined learning expectations result in more meaningful assessment of student learning and allow for more useful feedback to students. Clearly articulated goals at the disciplinary level provide this type of foundation for academic programs.

Political science has no unified set of clearly defined student learning goals or outcomes measures. As a consequence, a political science major from any institution in the country may or may not have a clear understanding or definition of their field of study. On the one hand, the variety of political science programs makes the discipline rich, diverse, and strong. The content of each political science course is potentially unique with different student learning goals and outcomes. Students are

undoubtedly learning important content. When it comes to measuring this learning, course assessments provide course and department level data which is valuable for program level assessment. On the other hand, at the level of the discipline, which is national in scope, assessment data may be disparate and un-unified.<sup>3</sup> In other words, student learning assessment data may not provide information about the identity of the discipline or produce feedback on its purpose. Broadly speaking, political science departments tend not to engage in a structured conversation about teaching and learning within the discipline. Political science is lagging behind other programs and disciplines which are aggressively exploring this topic in great detail (Clarke et al. 2002).

This is not to say the goals of political science are hidden or buried. These goals can be identified in a conversation which has been going on since the inception of the field over a century ago. Nevertheless, political scientists should be asking, as part of this conversation, whether these disciplinary goals are addressed in the curriculum, and if political science students are actually learning these disciplinary goals. The larger question of whether students are learning in accordance with disciplinary goals, and what they are learning, is increasingly examined in the literature on student learning assessment and assessment practices across higher education. Unfortunately, whether political science students are meeting the learning goals of the discipline is not specifically addressed in this literature. This presents an opportunity for political science educators to strengthen the discipline's essential identity and goals. Additionally, political science can empower its place in the

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<sup>3</sup> This research only looks at the discipline of political science in the United States.

academic spectrum with a strong voice in this important literature. This research is meant to strengthen this voice.

The discipline of political science can look for direction in this conversation from other academic disciplines that have examined teaching and learning assessment for a longer period of time. Nursing and other health professions being fields subject to external accreditation pressures have established performance assessments. The applied nature of these fields has made this necessary. “Nursing educators have long espoused what other educators are recently suggesting: that what matters is how students use knowledge, not just whether they possess requisite knowledge” (Goldman 2007, 27). In the field of education, state and national agencies and boards (e.g., National Accreditation of Teacher Education), define program level student learning outcomes, and measure these outcomes using licensure tests (Schmid and Kiger 2007, 32-33). Schmid and Kiger point out that faculty in these programs have spent countless hours over the years examining learning outcomes, curricula, learning activities, and assessment mechanisms. According to Schmid and Kiger, this examination has contributed to curricular improvement in these particular programs (2007, 36). The external pressures of the health and education professions are not present for the social science disciplines as these disciplines are not subject to these same licensure demands.

Some social science disciplines have explored theories of learning and education more than others. In psychology, this exploration has resulted in the subfield of educational psychology (see the review of the literature presented in Chapter Two). In sociology, assessment of student learning has been the subject of



publications since the late 1980s, with entire issues of professional journals devoted to assessment discussions.

Sociology, which is closely related to political science, has been involved in conversations specifically about the development of disciplinary goals since the 1970s. According to Weiss et al. the 1978 work of Miriampolski represents an attempt to articulate disciplinary goals for sociology that include: “understanding social determinism, relativizing culture, instilling a sense of social realism, and developing skills in critical evaluation” (2002, 71). The authors also point to the 1980 work by Vaughan who reviewed sociology course syllabi, conducted interviews with department chairs, and examined other disciplinary sources, to come up with four identified disciplinary goals for sociology: “(1) to transmit a body of knowledge to the students; (2) to develop certain substantive understandings in the students; (3) to contribute to the general intellectual and personal development of students; and, (4) to contribute to students’ vocational preparation” (Vaughan 1980, 268). Later, Wagenaar identified ten disciplinary goals that were eventually incorporated by the American Sociological Association as the goals of sociology (1991).<sup>4</sup> Weiss et al. note: “These two sets of goals [Vaughan’s and Wagenaar’s] have been widely cited and used as a foundation for their own goal setting by sociology programs around the country” (2002, 72). Along these lines, Weiss et al. suggest that sociology

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<sup>4</sup> Wagenaar presents a very detailed list of these goals including student skill and knowledge acquisition. These goals are briefly stated here: (1) to understand the discipline of sociology and its role in contributing to our understanding of social reality; (2) to understand the role of theory in sociology; (3) to understand the role of evidence and qualitative and quantitative methods in sociology; (4) to understand basic concepts in sociology and their fundamental theoretical interrelations; (5) to understand how social structure operates; (6) to understand reciprocal relationships between individual and society; (7) to understand the macro/micro emphasis; and, (8) to understand in depth at least one area within sociology. Two generic goals are also identified by the author: (9) to think critically; and, (10) to develop values.

departments consider using disciplinary goals to help define their student learning outcomes and assessment processes. The authors also argue: “What is needed is more empirical research – both descriptive and explanatory- that relates to context, content, process, and effects of goal...” (2002, 72). This research picks up Weiss et al.’s recommendation and applies this to the discipline of political science.

The purpose of this current study is to contribute to a small but growing conversation concerning teaching and student learning within political science (Clarke et al. 2002). With thanks to current efforts of the American Political Science Association (APSA), this conversation is being revived. This recent revival focuses interest on teaching and learning, as well as cultivates reflection on the purpose of the discipline. This study is a contribution to this revival and seeks to expand upon existing research within this area.

### **Chapter Overview**

The first question driving this research is intended to further the conversation about teaching and learning in political science: To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curriculum of political science? A review the discipline’s history and accompanying literature establishes the presence of these goals. This is followed by an inductive exploration of whether these goals inform curricular structures within political science departments. The second question of this research concerns the way in which disciplinary goals are manifest in student learning: To what extent is science student learning aligned with the goals of political science?

Chapter Two reviews the broader literature on education and reviews theories and approaches to student learning in higher education. This part of the literature

review also looks at student learning in civic or political education and critical thinking within higher education. Chapter Two also presents an overview of the culture of assessment in higher education and the literature on student learning assessment. Chapter Three reviews the literature on the history of political science and identifies the disciplinary goals that emerge from this history. The history of political science in higher education has evolved through various stages and contexts. From these stages and contexts the discipline's identity and goals for its students and scholars emerged. The traditional and behavioral eras defined the following goals: student attainment of a general knowledge of politics and political systems; student attainment of a general understanding of political processes; and, education for citizenship (or civic education). The later eras of post-behavioralism, and beyond, furthered the goal of critical thinking which had its origins in the discipline's early years. How these goals emerged from these eras and from over a century of recommendations made to the discipline is further explained in Chapter Three.

Together the literature review presented in Chapters Two and Three establish the foundations of this research and its questions. A lot has been written about the discipline of political science. By weaving a thread through this literature, it will be shown that there are identifiable, significant, and consistent disciplinary goals.

Chapter Four explains the methodology used in this study. This chapter describes the process of examining curricular models and student learning aligned with the disciplinary goals. It explains how syllabi were collected in the search for the presence of student learning outcomes that aligned with the disciplinary goals. It further explains the design of a survey which provides information on political

science student knowledge and experiences that aligned to the disciplinary goals, and the method of recruitment of student participation in this survey. This chapter also illustrates the methodology undertaken to test a series of hypotheses.

Chapters Five and Six present analyses of the gathered data. Chapter Five looks specifically for the presence of disciplinary goals within a sample of political science departments around the country. Considering the 20<sup>th</sup> century recommendations made to the discipline (see Chapter Three), this study analyzes the content of department catalogs, websites, and major program of study requirements to determine if the recommendations are reflected in what these departments are doing. In addition, political science program structures were examined for the presence of identifiable curricular models. Samples of department goals and objectives present in the descriptions of their majors requirements were also examined for the presence of the disciplinary goals. Chapter Five also provides further detail about how a sample of course syllabi were selected and content analyzed for the presence of the disciplinary goals.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter Six delves into political science student learning alignment with established disciplinary goals. Survey data on student knowledge and learning experiences in their political science coursework provide evidence illustrating the degree of alignment or non-alignment to disciplinary goals. From this review, it was ascertained that a propensity of political science department curricula and political science student learning reflect a degree of alignment to most of the discipline's identifiable goals. Chapter Seven draws conclusions from this analysis and further

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<sup>5</sup> The selection of institutions included in this study comes from the Carnegie classification and is explained further in Chapter Four.

evaluates the meaning and relevance of the findings. The concluding chapter also presents recommendations for further study in this area.

### **Conclusion**

This introductory chapter identifies the primary purpose goal of this research: to integrate a voice within the conversation about student learning, a discussion that is central to unifying the course, program, institutional, and accreditation levels of the discipline. This integration assists in strengthening the discipline's identity, raises issues useful for improving disciplinary practices, and furthers the discipline's contributions to higher education. Pertaining to this purpose are the following research goals: to identify definitive disciplinary goals of political science; to examine the extent to which these goals are reflected in political science curricula; and, to assess whether student learning aligns with these disciplinary goals. This research adds to the literature on teaching and learning that is emerging in the discipline of political science and aims to evoke further consideration by the discipline's practitioners who work in the halls of higher education. The need for a continued discussion exists throughout higher education and this discussion is overdue in political science departments.

The next two chapters locate this research in the literature. A review of the literature identifies central components of student learning and assessment in higher education and the disciplinary goals of political science. This review is followed by analyses of the study's hypotheses which demonstrate if these goals are reflected in curricular models, and if student learning aligns with these goals.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW PART I:**  
**STUDENT LEARNING AND THE CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT**

**Overview and Purpose**

Chapters Two and Three present a comprehensive review of literature in the field. This chapter includes the an examination of the literature on student learning including student learning in the context of civic or political education, and recent literature on assessment and practices of measuring student learning in higher education. The context of student learning in higher education and the emphasis placed on critical thinking and civic education underscore the significance of this research's focus on student learning in political science. This chapter also reviews the climate of public accountability and higher education and highlights some of the methodological suggestions drawn from the literature about recognizing, measuring, and assessing student learning in higher education. The questions of what we know about how students learn about politics and their acquisition of critical thinking skills are central to this literature review and inform this research's methodology and analyses. This review highlights the ideas and theories that have informed pedagogical innovations in higher education and at the disciplinary levels. The ideas and theories presented in this literature review chapter provide the foundations for Chapter Three's review of political science's history, the identification of the disciplinary goals, and curricular developments within the discipline.

In order to understand student learning in political science it is first necessary to examine the literature on education, teaching and learning. This literature can be categorized into the following areas:

- Early theories of political education;
- Student learning in higher education and the social sciences;
- Critical thinking and political education in higher education; and,
- Assessment of student learning.

Hutchings (2002) argued that the scholarship on teaching and learning in political science was an area in need of development. Some of the gaps within this literature can be filled through an examination of literature looking at political education and student learning. Before this can be developed, it is first necessary to look at the theoretical perspectives that inform approaches to education. This literature review begins at a broad level, examining theories of political education, moving into the literature on student learning, then into critical thinking and political education in higher education, and finally into assessing student learning. This section introduces critical thinking within civic education in political science, a topic that will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

### **Early Theories of Political Education**

Conversations about the nature of political education or citizenship have early roots in theories of the nature of education. Contemporary conversations about civic education in political science are imbued with a tension reflected in the questions: is the purpose of the discipline to mold students into being “good citizens,” or is it to

teach them to be “good thinkers?” How do departments address this tension in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Such philosophical debates influence approaches to teaching and learning today.

Perspectives of political education are found in early theories of education. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) made assumptions about human nature and politics. Through education, he believed, an individual develops moral behavior and responsibility for the good of society. Happiness, according to Aristotle, is based on an individual’s virtue achieved through a “liberal” education (the idea of “freeing” the mind). Aristotelian philosophy held that every individual in a society should be educated in this way for the maintenance of a democratic society. This philosophy held: “The citizen should be molded to suit the form of government under which he originally formed and which continues to preserve it. The character of democracy creates democracy, and the character of oligarchy creates oligarchy; and always the better the character, the better the government” (Somerville and Santoni 1963, 100). This belief that education, specifically civic education, should be in the service of the state has informed pedagogical approaches and curricular structures in higher education (Hobson 2001, 18-19).

Aristotelian sentiment was echoed in Francis Lieber’s 1858 Columbia University address as Chair of the Department of History and Political Science (discussed further in Chapter Three). This speech was about the importance of teaching political philosophy. Lieber remarked: “The fellest of things is armed injustice; History knows a fellow thing – an impassioned reasoning without a pure of heart in him that has power in a free country – the poisoning of the well of political



truth itself' (Farr and Seidleman 1993, 26). This sentiment continues to permeate pedagogical approaches and the belief that the role of education is to create virtuous individuals, good citizens, and, hence, good (democratic) government.

This idea of virtue and the individual's role in and to society also underscored John Locke's theory of human nature (1632-1704). Locke argued that individuals were born with a certain character that determined their position in life. In his 1693 *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke presented the notion that education helps every individual achieve the capacity to become a rational acting agent capable of moral reasoning. An individual has to be educated in order to achieve this reasoning capacity. Similar to Aristotle, Locke saw the role of education as the way to incorporate rational acting individuals into society where they would come to an agreement about how government should be organized.

Rousseau (1712-1778) followed Locke's theories with a more complete philosophy on education. In *Émile: or, On Education* (1792) Rousseau described the importance of self-realization through education. This realization was not for the purposes of the state but for the creation of the whole human being. According to Rousseau, self-actualization through education made the individual virtuous (similar to Locke's theory), and an important component of democracy. Unlike Locke, Rousseau did not believe in a pre-ordained social order. He believed that such an order was the construct of men. In *The Social Contract* (1762), as in *Émile*, Rousseau emphasized the importance of "free will." Unlike Aristotle, Rousseau argued that the individual comes before society, not the other way around (Somerville and Santoni 1963).

Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) starting point, like Rousseau's, was that humans were not born rational or moral, but that these were learned characteristics. Construction of the individual, according to Kant, was the role of education. Like Rousseau, Kant believed that the challenge for the individual was to retain some autonomy in the educational process. Kant held that autonomy was essential to all humans though it needed to be directed and tamed by an education that led "children to think for themselves and become autonomous individuals capable of genuine moral action" (Dickerson 2001, 62). Kant's contribution to this research is the argument that morality and rationality were only learned through education, and that these characteristics are essential to humanity. The roots of civic education or the value of educating "good citizens" are apparent in Kant's work.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), a sociologist, spent much of his career looking at the role of education in society. Like his philosophical predecessors, Durkheim argued the social importance of education (Pickering 2001, 165). Durkheim was interested in how education reproduced the norms and values of society. For Durkheim, education reflected society, served to maintain society, and created citizens suited for society. In this model, discipline and order were as much a part of the classroom as they were needed to maintain society. The role of education was to prepare individuals to be members of society and to train them for the roles they would assume in society. According to Durkheim, education was "a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and acting at which he would not have arrived spontaneously" (Lukes 1972, 12). As a product of the collective society, changes in the institution of education reflect changes in society. For instance, if

society demands more critical thinking citizens, education will follow suit. If society demands greater student knowledge of government, then education would abide. In more contemporary terms, if society demands proof of this learning, education will have to provide this evidence.<sup>1</sup>

John Dewey (1859-1952) also examined many of these issues in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920) and *Ethics* (1932). In these manuscripts, Dewey promoted the idea that education was the means for democratic ends. In *Ethics* (1932) Dewey noted: “Democracy as a moral ideal is thus an endeavor to unite two ideas which have historically often worked antagonistically: liberation of individuals on one hand and promotion of a common good on the other” (Dewey [1932] 1963, 498). Dewey also believed that the purpose of education was to enhance individual capacity for thought and knowledge and that education serving this purpose worked for the betterment of society. He saw schools as places where students could learn through experiences that contributed to their later participation in a democracy. In his work, Dewey saw the need for individuals in a democratic society to develop reflective inquiry and critical thinking skills to become active and productive members of society (further discussed later in this chapter). Apple and Teitelbaum explained Dewey’s position on education: “Only rational criticism and experimentation, linked to concern for the creation of a humane and just society, could do so.... In effect, the classroom was to embrace the kind of democratic community life, concern for human dignity, and scientific intelligence that was sought outside the school. The ‘means’ were in fact the ‘ends’” (2001, 180-181).

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in the form of more standardized exams and state mandated performance standards.

This snapshot of a few early theories of political education highlights long held assumptions that a fundamental role of education is to create good citizens. This review further provides a glimpse into the philosophies of political education. Institutions of higher education as well as many academic disciplines have assumed this role. This is frequently evidenced in the mission statements of many public colleges and universities today. Creation of the “good citizen” or civic education has also been adopted as an important goal of political science (Chapter Three).

### **Student Learning in Higher Education**

Early theories of education focused on the relationship between politics and the individual situated within political structures. Education theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused more on how students learn. In higher education, Biggs (1996) identified two theoretical education categories: the “objectivist” and the “constructivist” traditions. Objectivism in this context is based on the idea that fact and knowledge can be learned, “independently of particular contexts” and: “Teaching is a matter of transmitting this knowledge, learning of receiving it accurately, storing it, and using it appropriately” (Biggs, 347). Constructivism is when “meaning is created by the learner, not imposed by reality or transmitted by direct instruction” (348). The implication of these ideas for student learning in higher education is profound:

“...a consensus would be that learners arrive at meaning by actively selecting, and cumulatively constructing, their own knowledge, through both individual and social activity. The learner brings an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous knowledge that envelopes every

teaching/learning situation and determines the course and quality of the learning that may take place. The teacher may ignore or use this learner-structured framework, but the centrality of the learner is given” (Biggs 1996, 348).

Barr and Tagg discuss learner-centered education in, “From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education” (1995). The authors explained the shift for colleges and universities from the goal of instruction (of the “instruction paradigm”) to the goal of learning (or the “learning paradigm”). This accounts for the shift from the lecture-centered classroom to the learning paradigm, which “ends the lecturer's privileged position, honoring in its place whatever approaches serve best to prompt learning of particular knowledge by particular students” (1995, 2). Learning, according to these scholars, was similar to that process described by cognitive theory. They stated:

“In the Learning Paradigm, knowledge consists of frameworks or wholes that are created or constructed by the learner. Knowledge is not seen as cumulative and linear, like a wall of bricks, but as a nesting and interacting of frameworks. Learning is revealed when those frameworks are used to understand and act. Seeing the whole of something-the forest rather than the trees, the image of the newspaper photo rather than its dots- gives meaning to its elements, and that whole becomes more than a sum of component parts. Wholes and frameworks can come in a moment-a flash of insight-often after much hard work with the pieces, as when one suddenly knows how to ride a bicycle” (1995).

Barr and Tagg's learning paradigm was based on the idea that not only will a student be able to memorize a fact, but will be able to apply facts to other situations relevant in their life, having "a sufficient grasp of concepts, principles, or skills so that one can bring them to bear on new problems and situations, deciding in which ways one's present competencies can suffice and in which ways one may require new skills or knowledge" (Gardiner 1993 cited Barr and Tagg 1995). In short, knowledge is the framework, learning is iterative.

Howard Gardner's (1993) work on "multiple intelligences" also provides insight into student learning and is useful for considering student learning in higher education (Barrington 2004). Multiple intelligence theory proposed "there are *not just two* ways to be intelligent, but many ways. This challenges the idea of intelligence as a unitary capacity that can be measured by IQ tests" (Barrington 2004, 422).<sup>2</sup> Gardner asserted that "intelligence is the ability to solve problems and fashion products that are valued in a particular cultural setting or community" (Barrington 2004). In his analysis of Gardiner's work, Barrington considered multiple intelligence theory as inclusive pedagogy building on Dewey's idea of educating the individual, while including a perspective of how the individual learned. Barrington claimed: "teaching and learning in Western higher educational institutions still privileges certain ways of knowing and focuses on a narrow view of intellect" (422). Barrington's review of Gardner's multiple intelligences may be significant for classrooms in higher

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<sup>2</sup> The eight intelligences identified in Gardner's research are: linguistic intelligence; logical-mathematical intelligence; spatial intelligence; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; musical intelligence; interpersonal intelligence; intrapersonal intelligence; and naturalist intelligence.

education where students typically come from a range of academic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

Barrington explained that while there are other theories about pedagogical approaches, multiple intelligence theory was most useful in gauging how students learn and reflects the constructivist approach. Barrington's point about the diversity of the higher education classroom is an important perspective to consider when exploring student learning, including how individuals learn about citizenship and democracy.

Despite its potential pedagogical applicability, Kezar (2001) argued that Gardiner's theory, while applied to K-12 education, had been ignored by higher education professionals.<sup>4</sup> Barrington also argued that higher education has done little experimentation with teaching methods based on multiple intelligences stating: "It is acknowledged that the climate in universities in the last several decades has not helped academics to experiment with, or adapt to, new teaching methodologies..." (2004, 428). He also noted that the pressures of research, and growing reference to students as "consumers" or "clients," left little time for faculty to explore pedagogical alternatives (2004, 428). Fortunately, multiple intelligence theory can offer constructive ways for faculty to explore changes to their curriculum, subject delivery and assessment of student learning (Chapters Three and Four).

The context of the opportunity described above reveals a paucity of literature about student learning at the disciplinary level of the social sciences aside from well

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<sup>3</sup> This can be seen in current U.S. Census data, which indicates that in 2005, 68.6 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college. Of these students enrolled in college, 55.7 percent were black and 44 percent were Hispanic (U.S. National Center for Education Statistics). It is interesting to note that the 2006 statistics depict a decrease in female, Black, and Hispanic enrollment. However, the overall trend over the past two and half decades shows an increase in the enrollment of these groups.

<sup>4</sup> "The implications of this theory have been significant for elementary and secondary schools. Many schools are moving from being teacher and curriculum centered to be individual learner centered since there is an appreciation of each student's unique combination of intelligences" (Kezar 2001, 145).

formulated theories in the field of psychology, though little in the area of political science. Psychology has a long tradition of studying human learning. In their brief overview of the scholarship of teaching and learning in psychology, Nummedal et al. stated: “The impact of learning theorists can be traced from Thorndike to B.F. Skinner, who, in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, advocated the use of programmed instruction and teaching machines” (Nummedal et al. 2002, 164).<sup>5</sup> These theories identified by Nummedal et al. fit into the school of behaviorism and hold that the environment influences human behavior or learning, and that this behavior could be observed and predicted. Ideas of learning in psychology later turned to cognitive theory and “the influences of culture and community” (Nummedal et al., 2002, 165).<sup>6</sup> Over time, cognitive theories that assumed thinking to be the same for everyone and at every age were replaced by theories of cognitive development and constructivism. These theories had been developed following empirical observation that there are levels of cognitive development at every phase of an individual’s life (Piaget, Vygotsky, Habermas). The level of development determined how the individual processed stimuli in their environment, and hence, how they learned.<sup>7</sup> For Vygotsky,

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<sup>5</sup> Thorndike’s theory of effect said that when a desired outcome is achieved, the act to achieve that outcome will be replicated (Thorndike 1905). The behaviorist theories of Hull (1943) and Skinner (1968) held that learning resulted from reinforcement.

<sup>6</sup> Cognitive theory is further explained: “that an individual learner must actively ‘build’ knowledge and skills and that information exists within these built constructs rather than in the external environment. However, all advocates of constructivism agree that it is the individual’s processing of stimuli from the environment and the resulting cognitive structures, that produce adaptive behavior, rather than the stimuli themselves” (Huitt 2003).

<sup>7</sup> From <http://gsi.berkeley.edu/resources/learning/cognitive.html>: “Behaviorists maintain that knowledge is a passively absorbed behavioral repertoire. Cognitive constructivists reject that claim, arguing instead that knowledge is actively constructed by learners and that any account of knowledge makes essential references to cognitive structures. Knowledge comprises active systems of intentional mental representations derived from past learning experiences. Each learner interprets experiences and information in the light of their extant knowledge, their stage of cognitive development, their cultural background, their personal history, and so forth. Learners use these factors to organize their experience and to select and transform new information. Knowledge is therefore actively constructed by the



([1930] 1978), central to this idea of constructivism was that learning involved social interaction. For example, continuous feedback from a teacher helps construct student knowledge.<sup>8</sup> The same can be said of environmental stimuli where an individual enters a situation with prior knowledge, learns from their settings what works or does not work, and then changes their actions accordingly. In terms of understanding how students learn the field of psychology contributes to understanding how an individual's experience and environment shape understanding, and hence learning.

Constructivism and behaviorism apply to teaching and learning and these concepts lead into a discussion of critical thinking. Huitt's explanation of the applicability of both the behaviorist and constructivist theories in the classroom provides a context for this discussion:

“Advocates of a constructivistic approach suggest that educators first consider the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the learning task. The school curriculum should then be built so that students can expand and develop this knowledge and experience by connecting them to new learning. Advocates of the behavioral approach, on the other hand, advocate first deciding what knowledge or skills students should acquire and then developing curriculum that will provide for their development” (2003).

Evident in the above quote is the linkage between constructivist and behavioral approaches to student learning and critical thinking, a skill requiring

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learner rather than passively absorbed; it is essentially dependent on the standpoint from which the learner approaches it.”

<sup>8</sup> Vygotsky called this the “zone of proximal development.” For example, the teacher works with a student on the skill of writing or another end goal (Schuell 1986), points out to the students where the gaps are in their knowledge, and where they can improve. The student then works on (practices) that skill until they achieve the desired outcome.

students to recall what they already know, understand what they do not know, seek out multiple sources of information to fill gaps in knowledge, and critically analyze sources for validity. According to the Washington State Critical Thinking Project, critical thinking involves: “problem identification, the establishment of a clear perspective on the issues, recognition of alternative perspectives, context identification, evidence identification and evaluation, recognition of fundamental assumptions implicit or stated by the representation of an issue, and assessment of implications and potential conclusions” (Washington State University, *Critical Thinking Project*). Political science’s emphasis on critical thinking embodies the constructivist approach.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between critical thinking, student learning, and the discipline of political science is explored further in Chapter Three.

Theories of cognitive or constructivist learning continue to be an important topic in discussions about education and have evoked debate. Hirsch, who argued that higher education fails to “perpetuate a strong sense of loyalty to the national community and its civic institutions,” also contended that a “content rich core curriculum is the *only* viable remedy” to education failures in the United States (2009, 7). Hirsch derided educators for their engagement in anti-curricular practices evident among the constructivist traditions, and their dismissal of the recommendations from those who urge a return to core skills in education. Despite this critique, critical

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<sup>9</sup> Higher-order learning is popularly epitomized by Bloom’s Taxonomy (Bloom 1956). Bloom’s learning “pyramid” defined learning as a process which includes (from the broad – or the less, to the narrow – or the more complex): remembering (knowledge); understanding (comprehension); applying (application); analyzing (analysis); evaluating (synthesis); creating. This higher-ordered learning scheme has been used in education since the 1960s, but the broader areas of the pyramid, knowledge, comprehension and understanding, are most frequently evaluated.

thinking has remained central to civic education, and to both the behaviorist and cognitive approaches to learning.

### **Critical Thinking and Political Education in Higher Education**

The previous discussion illustrates a link between student learning in higher education, political education, and introduces critical thinking at the general and disciplinary specific levels in higher education. It has been shown that early theories of education focused on behaviorist approaches or curriculum-driven teaching. Later the cognitive development, or constructivist, schools focused on active learning, or learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning that integrated critical thinking into curricula. Critical thinking in student learning leads back to a discussion of civic or political education.

The shift from and debates about behaviorism to cognitive theory and constructivism have implications for civic education. The study of civic or political education (or political socialization) is useful in examining and explaining how students learn about democracy and citizenship.<sup>10</sup> As a part of enhancing democracy Galston argued: “well-designed institutions are not enough, that a well ordered polity requires citizens with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and traits of character” (Galston 1991). Galston later added that “good citizens are made, not born” (2001, 1). Galston described debates in political science around what kind of democracy civic education should address (see March and Olsen’s 2000 discussion of the different conceptions of democracy). He claimed that consensus had been reached when it came to educating the “good citizen.” Whether educating for a representative

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<sup>10</sup> The 1951 *Goals for Political Science* report explains that concept of “political socialization” refers to civic education.

democracy, or for what Barber et al. (1997) referred to as “strong democracy” involving civic participation, “the skills needed to judge the deeds of representatives and to initiate action oneself are both important; civil discourse need not lack passion; the emphasis on the ability to make reasoned judgment does not mean that secular reason is to be given pride of place over faith; classroom and community practice both have a role to play in forming citizens, and so forth” (Galston 2001, 2). Galston is referring to critical thinking skills and political knowledge that have the affect of decreasing levels of alienation, increasing support for democratic institutions, and increasing political participation (Galston, 10-11 and Wahlke 1991).

Barr and Tagg's idea of the “Learning Paradigm” is useful in this examination of critical thinking and civic education (1995). In this paradigm, education for democracy and civic education involve critical thinking as an essential skill for political learning. Barr and Tagg noted that for higher education to move in this direction, it must lead...:

“to a set of new questions and a domain of possible responses. What knowledge, talents, and skills do college graduates need in order to live and work fully? What must they do to master such knowledge, talents, and skills? Are they doing those things? Do students find in our colleges a coherent body of experiences that help them to become competent, capable, and interesting people? Do they understand what they've memorized? Can they act on it? Has the experience of college made our students flexible and adaptive learners, able to thrive in a knowledge society?” (1995).

The work of Galston, Barr and Tagg, and others reveals the significance of teaching and learning for democracy while pointing out the normative issues involved with such prescriptive education. For example, Galston explained Samuel Popkin's (1999) theory of low-information rationality that "shows that citizens with low levels of information cannot follow public discussions of issues, are less accepting of the give and take of democratic policy debates, make judgments on the basis of character rather than issues, and are significantly less inclined to participate in politics at all" (Galston 2001, 3). In this context, political socialization is not only about the role of the family, community, churches, friends, and other social networks in educating citizens. Galston emphasized that despite these intervening factors in an individual's life, political knowledge was gained through formal education. He pointed to survey research that indicated greater education translated into higher levels of political knowledge. Political knowledge and critical thinking are essential to an education that emphasize citizenship and civic education.

Galston referred to political knowledge through formal education as a national priority. This perspective has found its way into state legislation mandating curriculum for higher education. Consider California State Code of Regulations, Title 5 "Education":

"The purpose of the following requirements is to ensure that students acquire knowledge and skills that will help them to comprehend the workings of American democracy and of the society in which they live to enable them to contribute to that society as responsible and constructive citizens. To this end each campus shall provide for comprehensive study of American history and

American government including the historical development of American institutions and ideals, the Constitution of the United States and the operation of representative democratic government under that Constitution, and the processes of state and local government. To qualify for graduation each student shall demonstrate competence by completing courses in the foregoing fields or by passing comprehensive examinations in those fields” (Cal. Admin. Code tit. 5, § 40404).

Not only does California give priority to political knowledge and civic education, it defines the content of courses that meet this requirement. This general education requirement is often embodied in the American government and politics course in political science.<sup>11</sup>

Some critiques of such incorporation of critical thinking and civic education into higher education point to the politics associated with these goals. One concern has been that critical thinking has led to a “liberal relativism,” or what Habermas referred to as “extreme relativism.” This critique says critical thinking has led to a pedagogy that accepts all views, opinions, and beliefs; that if we just explore, communicate and debate these diverse views, we can know more. This is not new. Habermas himself emphasized the importance of understanding context, which means

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<sup>11</sup> According to Executive Order Number 405 of the California State University Chancellor’s Office (1982), the course meeting this requirement must include the following content:

1. “The political philosophies of the framers of the Constitution and the nature and operation of the United States political institutions and processes under that Constitution as amended and interpreted.
2. The rights and obligations of citizens in the political system established under the Constitution.
3. The Constitution of the State of California within the framework of evolution of Federal-State relations and the nature and processes of State and local government under the Constitution.
4. Contemporary relationships of State and local government with the Federal government, the resolution of conflicts and the establishment of cooperative processes under the constitutions of both the State and nation, and the political processes involved” (Office of the Chancellor, The California State University 1982, 2).

thinking outside of a particular discipline or facts (decentering) or thinking outside of one's own thoughts or perspectives (Habermas 1990). Paul added that this type of thinking involves obtaining more facts that move one towards greater objectivity and beyond cultural and educational contexts in order to achieve better understanding (Scrivon and Paul 2004). It is within this notion of objectivity where the question of citizenship is raised.<sup>12</sup>

If higher education emphasizes the idea of civic education that includes the notion of critical thinking, how is this present in student learning? How is this skill assessed?<sup>13</sup> In addition, do political science department's curricular structures best meet this call for critical thinking? Answering these questions may prove useful to political science programs as institutions of higher education meet greater demands for accountability. These challenges and this potential usefulness move this discussion into the literature on student learning assessment.

### **Assessment of Student Learning**

With the previous discussion of civic education and critical thinking in mind, the questions emerge: "How is learning in citizenship through civic education assessed? How are critical thinking skills assessed?" According to Ratcliff et al., most general education programs in higher education have critical thinking as a skill (2001), but do educators in their disciplines know if their students are learning this skill? These questions require a more specific application in order to be answered.

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<sup>12</sup> This study is not about how political socialization informs the construction of political ideas and behavior. It instead looks at how higher education in political science affects student political knowledge, political understanding, ideas of citizenship, and critical thinking,

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the challenges of answering this question for accreditors, the state, or the public, the discipline faces other challenges: Administrative leadership: turnover and transitions; Discipline leadership; Disciplinary culture: Continuity of and little change in curriculum; research, not teaching (Leonard 1999).

The question of assessing student learning is a pressing issue in public education. Institutions of higher education are increasingly pressured to provide evidence of student learning. Like other departments, political science departments are being asked to prove that their students are learning. The culture of assessment has inundated higher education and flooded departments with the work of addressing the demands of accreditation, institutional reviews, and various political pressures to demonstrate that they are “doing what they say they are doing.”

### **The Culture of Assessment**

Recent developments in the literature of learning in higher education compel further research and discussion. A volume of essays in *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* by Huber and Morreale (2002) describe the exploration of teaching and learning throughout academic disciplines. The authors note that much of this exploration has been done in the humanities. They add that other disciplines have explored this topic because of a number of changes faced by higher education. In their volume of essays on this topic, Huber and Morreale explained the changes in higher education were due to a number of factors. According to Huber and Morreale, “...at least four historical developments [that] are driving new interest in teaching and learning in higher education: new students, national priorities, public accountability, and changing pedagogical technologies” (2002, 6).<sup>14</sup> The first factor is the shift of student demographics since the 1960s characterized by an influx of older students and an increasingly diverse student population. The second

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<sup>14</sup> In the introduction to this series of essays, Huber and Morreale et al. explained that changes in technology impacted how faculty approach teaching and learning, specifically, the increased use of Web-based course delivery (2002, 1-24).



factor has been a shift in national priorities. Accompanying these national priorities have been demands for greater accountability. This has become an increasingly political issue as faculty are asked to demonstrate teaching and learning effectiveness to accrediting bodies, states, and the national government. This pressure was evident in the U.S. Department of Education's 2006 Spellings' Commission Report.

The increasing demands for assessment are quite real. According to William Zumeta of the University of Washington, "citizens expect publicly supported institutions to meet increased demands: Higher education, health care, and elementary-secondary education are called to account for processes, expenditures, and, increasingly, accomplishments" (2000, 57).<sup>15</sup> Zumeta calls this demand for greater transparency of public institutions part of the culture of democratic accountability.

Despite recent manifestation, this culture of accountability is not new (see footnote 14). In his review of the history of accountability, Zumeta cited the influence of corporate culture and "quality assurance" of the 1970s and 1980s. While not specific to higher education, the author argues that these ideas crept into education where universities have been asked to pay attention to outcomes and customer (student) satisfaction (2000, 1). The economic recession of the 1990s forced states to

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<sup>15</sup> Zumeta traced the history of accountability from the *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* in 1819 when the Supreme Court ruled that the university had some autonomy from the state (granting the college the right to privatize), to the *Morrill Act* of 1862 where the U.S. Congress legislated that states will grant land to public institutions of higher education (Zumeta, 59). Cohen (1998) explained that while governance over public higher education has been primarily at the state level, the *Morrill Act* changed the structure of governance along with the increase of federal financial aid to an increasing enrolling population. This funding contributed to a number of federal acts including the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1991 which "tightened requirements for educating people with disabilities" (Cohen, 373); the Civil Rights Act of 1991; and the Educate America Act of 1994, among others (Cohen, 373).

drastically cut public expenditures and raise college and university tuition. Zumeta explained that families forced to pay more for higher education in turn demanded greater efficiency from education. At the political level, Zumeta asserted that the struggle between politicians and academia is not new, citing the “cultural wars” of the 1960s and the McCarthy era. He argued that this struggle continued in the 1990s where politicians cited “political correctness” and “multiculturalism” in their assertion that academia has lowered its standards. These pressures, coupled with increasing enrollments in the 1990s had policy makers calling for greater measurements of efficiency and performance (Zumeta, 58).

More recent is the demand for increasing accountability of student learning standards in higher education (Transcript: “Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science” 2002).<sup>16</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Education, Spellings’ Commission *Report on America’s Colleges and Universities*: “There is inadequate transparency and accountability for measuring institutional performance, which is more and more necessary to maintaining public trust in higher education” (U.S. Department of Education 2006,14). The Spellings’ *Report* called upon institutions of higher education to provide information about what students learn over the course of their college education.<sup>17</sup> Subsequent to the writing of this report, other institutions and associations responded with their own studies on higher education accountability. The National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education “was created by the association of State Higher Education

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<sup>16</sup> The culture of accountability has permeated the K-12 environment and is prevalent in the halls of public universities and colleges.

<sup>17</sup> The commission stated: “Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a ‘value-added’ basis that takes into account students’ academic baseline when assessing their results” (U.S. Department of Education 2006, 4).

Executive Officers to stimulate conversations and make recommendations addressing the issue of accountability in higher education” (Lingenfelter 2005, 1).<sup>18</sup> This group pointed to problems of accountability demands on higher education:

- “We generate massive, unfocused reports on every conceivable aspect of higher education that generally go unread and unused;
- States are developing complex, burdensome ‘incentive budgeting’ schemes to motivate us to do what we should be doing anyway;
- We can’t answer straight-forward questions about success rates in higher education, and we are defensive about the graduation rates reported by the system we helped design;
- We have sticker prices that have grown much faster than inflation, and we cannot provide straight-forward answers to questions about net price to undergraduate students and changes over time; and,
- We don’t have good answers when asked, ‘Have students learned what they need to know?’” (2005, 2).<sup>19</sup>

The final point in this list has been a particular challenge for programs and institutions alike and is of particular interest to this study.

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<sup>18</sup> The Commission consisted of educators, administrators, private industry leaders, legislators, state higher education executives, and former governors.

<sup>19</sup> In its report, the Commission made a number of recommendations that reflected the growing call for public accountability of institutions of higher education. The Commission called on states and elected officials to assess the work-force and economic development needs of their respective states and then call on higher education to help meet these needs. While the Commission “specifically recommends *against* state assessments of learning as a means of *institutional* accountability...” it recommended: “At the same time, monitoring learning at the state level will help keep the public focused on education and our institutions focused on this fundamental priority” (4-5). At the federal level, the Commission recommended that the government “improve its data collection and reporting function by creating a student unit record system. Such a system is needed to monitor educational progress when students move among institutions and to provide more valid and reliable data on cost trends... and used to analyze the experience of groups of students it can help improve both public policies and institutional practice” (4-5).

The role of state oversight of institutions of higher education is significant and deserves to be reviewed. Some states appoint higher education executives to boards of trustees to oversee public higher education institutions (Zumeta 2000, 59).<sup>20</sup> These boards direct the purposes and missions of institutions. In the late 80s, “the governors of fifty states adopted a series of recommendations calling on higher education to clarify the missions of the various institutions, emphasize access and undergraduate education, implement assessment of student learning, and provide incentives to improve quality” (Cohen 1998, 375). Additionally, governors increasingly appoint their ideological allies to these boards (2000, 60) who in turn exert their business and economic world-view by demanding greater efficiency and accountability. In working with these boards, Zumeta explained that governors and legislators have increasingly threatened the withdrawal of funds, and have even threatened a university’s or college’s existence if they fail to comply with accountability standards. States also use incentives, or performance funding to “influence institutional priorities” (2000, 61). These policies and pressures have implications on accreditation processes and institutional practices.

### **Accreditation Pressures and Demands**

Public institutions of higher education are pressured by accreditation bodies to provide evidence of student learning. These associations also have a “complex relationship” with federal and state governments (Cohen 1998, 379). Accrediting associations and commissions purport to uphold a commitment to public

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<sup>20</sup> Zumeta explained that the role of boards or trustees as governing institutions was largely ceremonial (they entrusted most of the governing power to the college and university presidents and educators), this has changed in recent years.

accountability. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (one of eight regional accreditation associations): “One function of accreditation is to provide the public with an explanation of the broad scope of higher education and to assure the public that the goals of higher education have been achieved by evaluating each institution within the context of its mission” (2007, 1). These associations “establish standards for institutions of programs for which it has oversight” (Cohen, 380) and are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, though the government has no oversight over accreditation associations.<sup>21</sup> However, if accreditation is not granted to an institution due to its failure to demonstrate an accomplishment or compliance of standards, the government may re-evaluate an institution’s eligibility for federal funding (Cohen, 380).

Cohen explained that in the 1990s accreditation standards became more learning-outcomes specific. “Institutions were expected to display planning and evaluation processes that covered all aspects of their operations: fiscal accountability, curriculum development, student performance, facilities maintenance...” (Cohen 1998, 381). He further explained that these standards “suggested a trend in intent if not substance. The accreditation process was a powerful shadow of government” (381). Cohen’s account depicts the political dimension of the accreditation process.

Institutions undergoing accreditation review require programs, and departments, offices, units, and others to provide evidence of how they meet accreditation student learning standards. Interestingly, nowhere in the pressures or

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<sup>21</sup> Many programs have accrediting bodies specific to their discipline required for licensure or degree completion. The nature of these agencies will not be explained in detail in this study since political science is not subject to such accreditation.

demands for accountability are there requirements to demonstrate a formulation of goals or assessment of student learning at the level of the discipline.

The prospect of adding yet another level of assessment is admittedly daunting for programs and faculty amidst the demands of current assessment processes. Yet a disciplinary level of assessment leads to questions about whether the pressures of accreditation and of assessment have contributed to or distracted from instruction. Have these demands contributed to conversations about student learning in the discipline, or have these requirements become nothing more than a bureaucratic exercise? The growing demands of accountability and the usefulness of the current literature on assessment literature are examined in this section of the literature review. This review is important to understanding how student learning in political science aligns with the disciplinary goals (Chapter Three).

The pressure to provide answers to questions about student learning results in discussions of assessment strategies. Chapter Three of this research presents the political science disciplinary goals as starting points that can be used in developing assessment strategies. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education report on “Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources,” the construction of student learning goals or outcomes is based squarely on disciplinary definitions.<sup>22</sup> This regional accreditation commission has stated that student learning goals should be defined by what faculty want students to learn in studying the discipline (2007, 10). This means that student learning outcomes are tied to the goals of the discipline and these goals should be defined and articulated.

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<sup>22</sup> Throughout its report on student learning assessment, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education referred student learning outcomes back to the discipline.

This conversation about assessing student learning is not new. In the 1980s, discussions about learning outcomes and performance were present in numerous books and journal articles. For example, in *Achieving Educational Excellence* (1985), Astin recommended pre- and post- tests for students to demonstrate growth and development over their years of study. Despite twenty-five years of conversations about assessment, little agreement has been reached regarding the implementation or effectiveness of assessment. Reviewing the literature on assessment demonstrates the complexity of this conversation while also informing this research's methodology for gathering data on student learning in particular disciplines like political science.

The assessment literature covers classroom, program (degree or department), and institutional levels of focus. At the level of the classroom, the assessment literature has explored the formulation of student learning outcomes, teaching techniques, and assessment mechanisms. Some of this literature is couched in the psychological theories of constructivism or the literature on critical thinking. Yorke referred to this as “formative assessment” where the student is given “credit for what has been done to the expected standard, to correct what is wrong and to encourage emancipation by alerting the student to possibilities which he or she may not hitherto discerned” (2003, 478). There is also Astin's (1985) recommendation for pre and post-testing of students as one assessment mechanism suggested to measure student learning. Some literature suggests that programs and institutions assess student learning overall rather than just conducting classroom based assessment (see Suskie 2004; Leskes and Wright 2005; Angelo and Cross 1993; McTighe and Wiggins 1999; Palomba and Banta 1999; and Barkley, Cross and Major 2005). While the literature



on assessment proliferates, it still lacks a coherent set of methods and strategies for gathering data on student learning at all levels.

There are many examples of indirect measurements of student learning at the program and institution levels or what Yorke has referred to as “summative assessment,” (e.g., course and self evaluations, student surveys, and grades). Fewer suggestions exist for how to conduct direct assessment of student learning at the program or institution levels (some examples include a review of portfolios, standardized testing, etc.). According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education:

“Direct and indirect methods of evaluating learning relate to whether or not the method provides evidence in the form of student products or performances. Such evidence demonstrates that *actual learning* has occurred relating to a specific content or skill. Indirect methods reveal characteristics associated with learning, but they only imply that learning has occurred.

These characteristics may relate to the student, such as perceptions of student learning, or they may relate to the institution, such as graduation rates”

*(Student Learning Assessment: Resources and Options 2007, 35).*

It should be noted that indirect assessment mechanisms are valid and can contribute to measuring student learning. For instance, data gathered about student perceptions of what they know can help educators understand student academic placement at the beginning their college career.<sup>23</sup> For assessment of student learning in political

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<sup>23</sup> Some universities are using the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) to gauge critical and analytical thinking skills in first, second, and fourth year students. While not considered a direct assessment, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) may be one assessment tool to provide information about student development of critical thinking skills, one of the identified goals of political



science, this data does not necessarily provide information about what students know about politics specifically, or what content they know from other academic programs. Direct measurements, such as following student learning throughout the length of a student's collegiate career (a longitudinal "value added" method which looks at what the student learns over time) is time consuming and wrought with challenges about how to gauge where students are learning (e.g., school, home, friends, or media). Thus, discovering how students learn about politics cannot only rely on such time sensitive studies without considering the sources of where they obtain their information about politics.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to note that sometimes accreditation bodies ask programs to demonstrate the relationship between their programmatic goals and those of institutions. For example, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education asked their member institutions to demonstrate how goals at the course and program levels correlate with the goals of the institution's general education curriculum as well as institution wide goals or university mission statements (see the accreditation Commission's report on *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources*, 2007). The Commission explained:

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science. This exam is administered to a cohort of first year students, and re-administered to the same cohort during their second and fourth year. Unfortunately, few institutions of higher education participate in the CLA study. While some information about student learning in critical thinking can be gathered from CLA data, it cannot provide information specific about political science students. Nonetheless, the CLA information may be indicative of overall student learning and can contribute to developing the overall goals of curricular development as well as to processes a part of institutional accountability (e.g., assessment, accreditation, etc.).

<sup>24</sup> This gets to the idea of researching "value added" knowledge. Such research would entail following a cohort of students throughout their academic careers, looking at which classes each student takes and measuring what they are learning in each course. The challenges with such research is that it is difficult to assess whether or not the student's knowledge is coming only from the classroom environment, and how to take into account external conditions in the student's life that influence their learning.

“Students learn specific content and skills in each course. In aggregate, those courses, together with other program experiences such as academic advising, internships, and faculty-directed research by students, should result in the desired student outcomes at the program level. Similarly, goals at the program level combine with general education goals, extra- and co-curricular goals, information literacy goals, and other goals (for example, ethical and civil leadership goals) to create institutional goals. In other words, goals at the institution, program, and course (or activity) levels are interconnected, complimentary, and reciprocal” (2007).

In other words, institutions undergoing accreditation must show how student learning measured at the program level relates to the mission of the university. Again, this requirement is an effort towards greater public accountability as accreditation bodies ask for evidence that student learning aligns with disciplinary goals (the National Accreditation of Teacher Education requires this for every teacher education program).

The discipline of political science is called upon to provide assessment data as are other higher education disciplines as part of the institutional performance measures. Thus the discipline like all higher education disciplines also faces the task of measuring student learning. Disciplines like psychology have been addressing the task of measuring student learning for decades. As discussed previously in the review of the literature, the study of student learning has been central to theories of learning and disciplines such as found in educational psychology. Sociologists have also taken up this conversation in an organized manner in the pages of the disciplinary journal

*Teaching Sociology* whose first issue appeared in 1973. This journal contains articles with pedagogical theories and assessment debates. Weiss et al. (2002) explained how the American Sociological Association began encouraging assessment activity in the early 1990s (2002, 64) and recommended that departments survey “graduates on similar issues, as well as on their identification with sociology” (65).

Increased attention to the assessment demands in other social science disciplines such as sociology has not resulted in unified acceptance or creation of universal assessment processes. Despite the increase in sociology departments that report using assessment tools to evaluate student learning, the American Sociological Association’s 2007 survey of departments showed that few departments are satisfied with their assessment practices. Among the issues most commonly raised by department chairs in the survey was “the obsession with assessment” (Spatler-Roth 2008, 1). Despite the apparent resistance and reservations among sociologists in the discipline and among educators in other departments in the social sciences, assessment pressures remain.

If student learning is important to political science departments, and in light of increasing pressures of accountability, it is essential that political science educators examine and understand the ways in which students learn about politics. Assessing student learning specifically in the discipline of political science is valuable to political science departments and can be used to understand where departments are, or are not addressing larger goals of the discipline. Such assessment is more organic or “home-grown” than ones imposed by outside accrediting or government institutions. If departments complete assessment procedures using these goals, data

will be available for department self-examination of teaching and learning. To engage in such organic or self-directed assessment, it is first important to identify the disciplinary goals and gauge how political science departments are meeting the goals of the discipline.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation is about student learning in the discipline of political science. The first part of the literature review highlights cognitive and behaviorist theories of education and establishes the centrality of civic education and critical thinking in higher education. These elements appear frequently in theories of education from Aristotle to Dewey. These elements also appear in the theories of student learning from Gardiner to Paul and underscore the learning goals in social science disciplines including political science. The assessment literature reviewed in this chapter provides useful information that informs the research methods of this study and the significance of measuring student learning.

This literature review establishes the relevance of this dissertation and reveals areas that can be researched further by looking at political science student learning. The second part of the literature review continues this discussion by placing the theories reviewed in Chapter Two in the context of political science.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW PART II:**  
**THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ITS**  
**DISCIPLINARY GOALS**

**Overview and Purpose**

The second part of the literature review informing this research moves into the topic of student learning in the discipline of political science. This chapter reviews the history of the discipline of political science in the United States and associated developments in curricular structures. The curricular goals of the discipline emerge from this history and contribute to the foundation of this research. This review highlights the structure, purpose of, and challenges faced by political science as the discipline engages the conversations of disciplinary epistemology and student learning more deeply.

An examination of the structure and purpose of political science and what students are learning in the classroom is inextricably linked to the origins and evolution of the discipline in the United States. This history reveals unifying principles that distinguish the discipline from other social science disciplines. While every political scientist brings unique goals and objectives into the classroom, their goals and objectives are arguably informed by the fundamental unifying principles of the discipline. These foundational concepts emerge from a culture and a body of scholarship and form the unique identity of political science.

The discipline's rich history and tradition have been the focus of much research (see Farr and Seidelman 1993). This history continues to be written given the political, social contexts and cultural dynamics studied in political science. Political science is also a component of higher education and its place in the halls of academia is interwoven with broader theories of education. Looking at the discipline's history through the lens of student learning textures the educational environment of political science.

The retelling of the discipline's history and the debates that color its development in the United States since the 1880s addresses the question "what is political science?" This evolution revolves around theory and method, that is, how politics is thought about or modeled, and how it is measured and analyzed.<sup>1</sup> The answers that emerge from this review contribute to the discipline's richness, complexity and vitality. Furthermore, this search for meaning and purpose results in clearer disciplinary identity, and strengthens disciplinary legitimacy (Lieber 1858).

Like its struggle to establish an identity since the turn of the twentieth century, the field of political science has also struggled with constructing curricular approaches to convey the content of the discipline while serving its students and society (Galston 2001). Hutchings (2002) of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, captured this struggle and its meaning for teaching and learning, saying: "Each discipline has its own intellectual history, its own agreements and disputes about subject matter and methods that influence what is taught and to

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<sup>1</sup> In his review of the discipline's literature, Ronald Chilcote explained: "*Theory* refers to sets of systematically related generalizations, and *method* is a procedure or process that involves the techniques and tools utilized in inquiry and for examining. *Methodology* consists of methods, procedures, working concepts, rules, and the like used for testing theory and guiding inquiry, and the search for solutions to problems of the real world" (1994, 3).

whom, where, how, and why, and the scholarship of teaching and learning must connect to these essential features of the discipline” (Clarke et al. 2002, 224). This connection between the political science’s history and practice is essential to understand.

## **History of the Discipline in the United States**

### **Traditional Approach**

Political science’s beginnings in the United States can be traced to Francis Lieber’s work as editor of the *Encyclopedia Americana* from 1829-1851 where he called for a scholarly field that studied “the idea of the state.” In 1857 Lieber became the first professor of political science in the U.S. (Barrow 2004, 311). In the 1880s the discipline of political science was officially established at Columbia University. These early years saw a discipline characterized as “statist” in nature (Easton 1953; Almond 1956; Gunnell 1994). Gunnell explained that political science during this time “centered on the concept of the state.” Additionally, Chilcote (1994) referred to this as the time of the “traditional approach” in political science. Considered the first stage of the discipline’s evolution, this approach “focused analysis on the structure of the state, elections, and political parties” (Chilcote, 56). Traditional studies focused on description of the origins of modern states, the branches of government, and the legal elements of political structures. Woodrow Wilson (1887), for example, encouraged the field to emphasize teaching and learning of historical European approaches to administration considered important for building models of government.

In his 1858 inaugural address to Columbia University, Francis Lieber rallied for the creation of a national university where studies of the state could take place, housed within a discipline of political science (Lieber 1858, 57-116). While Lieber did not specify a location for such a university, he called upon United States' academe to consider establishing a system similar to those in Western Europe where governmental institutions were studied and recreated after the Napoleonic wars.<sup>2</sup> Given that context, it is no surprise that Lieber argued that the purpose for a national university was to strengthen nationality. Lieber called for the university to produce public administrators in service to the state utilizing a curriculum emphasizing scholarship on the state. At the end of his address, Lieber noted: "Need I add that the student, having passed through these fields [the social sciences and history] and having viewed these regions, will be better prepared for the grave purposes for which this country destines him, and as a partner in the great commonwealth of self government? If not, then strike these sciences from your catalogue" (115-116).

This traditional approach embodied a sense of patriotism directing scholarly attention to democracy as a successful, practical, and modern ideal.<sup>3</sup> An education geared towards the mechanics of the state "was becoming identified with the machinery and institutions of government" (Gunnell 1996, 254) and was intended to produce elite scholars or leaders in government. In teaching these mechanics such a university would also create the "good citizen" under the premise that every individual must be a citizen who participates in the democratic system. Thus we find

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<sup>2</sup> Lieber explained that such a university would be "national in its spirit, in its work and effect, in its liberal appointments and comprehensive basis" (1858, 59).

<sup>3</sup> Gunnell explained that at this time "a positive attitude was attached to the concept of democracy..." (1996, 254).



in Lieber's words the foundations of the earliest purposes of the discipline of political science and two fundamental disciplinary goals: to build a discipline around political knowledge, laying the groundwork for civic responsibility and citizenship (or civic education).<sup>4</sup>

The goals of the traditional era continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century disciplinary evolution and informed later theories of political culture and political socialization. In 1963 Sydney Verba and Gabriel Almond defined political culture "in terms of political orientations and attitudes held by individuals in relation to their political system" or how citizens are socialized into their political systems (Chilcote 1994, 179). Almond later added that political knowledge determined an individual's feelings and opinions towards politics (political socialization).<sup>5</sup> These ideas about political culture contributed to further theories about political socialization, or how political culture was disseminated in society. According to Inkles and Smith (1974), "a modern nation needs participating citizens, men and women who take an active interest in public affairs and who exercise their rights and perform their duties as members of a community larger than that of the kinship network and the immediate geographical locality" (1974, 4). People had to be inculcated with this value.

For political science, the "approach to socialization is found in its attention on why and how individuals acquire beliefs about politics" and generally, "the consequences of socialization for the whole political system" (1994, 182). In the vein of the traditional era, political science concerned itself with the "institutions that

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<sup>4</sup> The goals are identified in the history of the discipline and at the end of the chapter will be listed in an order that will appear throughout the remainder of this research.

<sup>5</sup> Almond argued that this opinion could be empirically measured (behavioralism) (Chilcote 1994, 180).

shape the patterns of authority and legitimacy” (Chilcote, 183). Political socialization, Chilcote explained, continued into the turn of the century when the discipline was concerned with assimilating immigrant populations into American political culture. During this time, political scientists studied “the inculcation of skills, motives, and attitudes for the performance of roles in society” (Chilcote, 183). Such inculcation required teaching citizens about their political institutions.

#### *Training for Citizenship and Acquiring Political Knowledge.*

During the traditional era, political science curriculum focused on instilling the values and superiority of democracy by emphasizing the study of institutions of the state. The discipline essentially established itself as an agent for the state and as a vehicle driving development of democratic government.<sup>6</sup> Curriculum emphasized the history and functioning of institutions of the state, and most importantly, nurturing good citizens. Political science curriculum also emphasized training individuals to perform public administrative roles and the promotion of civic education (or education for citizenship). This disciplinary goal has persisted into the current era of political science education.

The traditional approach to political science garnered the attention of scholars who examined its implications for curricular development. Reflecting the context of the traditional era, the discipline’s curriculum at the time included education for citizenship as well as the acquisition of “substantive knowledge of politics” (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 661). Ishiyama et al. review the curricular

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<sup>6</sup> Defined by “a permanent population, a defined territory and a government capable of maintaining effective control over its territory and of conducting international relations with other states...recognition by other states” (Evans and Newham 1998, 512-513).

developments that emerged from this area as seen in the work of the Committee of Seven in 1915. According to the authors, the 1915 Committee of Seven's recommendations laid the foundation of a "primary learning objective of the political science major" (660). This Committee called for a "standardization of courses" where the learning objective "was the student's acquisition of knowledge and political training" (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 661). This Committee recommended a political science curriculum that included more rigorous study of American government in particular and an offering of a breadth of courses more generally.

The recommendations of the Committee of Seven had lasting implications on the discipline. In addition to the implications for civic education in political science curriculum emerged requirements for course sequencing. Later, the recommendations of the 1991 Wahlke Report to the discipline led some political science departments to devise course sequences whereby students would build knowledge based upon the following premise: "The more knowledge we have, the better we can understand the impact of public policies on our interest" (Galston 2001, 10). For example, Galston explained that voting without political knowledge was an indication of "uncertainty related to a lack of understanding about politics" (10). Requirements such as the introductory level political science courses would cover political knowledge, political socialization, and emphasize civic education.

In short, two goals appear during the discipline's traditional period and have continued to characterize the purpose of the discipline: students will gain a general knowledge about politics and political systems, and students will learn civic responsibility or citizenship (civic education).

## **Behavioral Approach to Political Science**

The “behavioral approach” followed the traditional era. The period of behavioralism in political science is described by Chilcote as “a reaction to the speculation of theory that offered explication, inference, and judgments based on norms or authoritative rules and standards as well as to the Western ethnocentrism, formalism, and description characteristic of the contemporary traditional approach” (1994, 57). While the functions of the discipline did not change much in the years following Lieber’s address, the traditional approach faced challenges from behavioralists. These challenges did not dismantle the purpose of creating elite scholars in a democracy as noted by Chilcote. Instead, this early twentieth century challenge pushed the discipline to extend its focus to the study of processes and groups vying for political power and resources (Bentley 1908; Beard 1913). The behavioral era also ushered in the early stages of critical thinking as an essential part of the discipline. From this era emerge two more identifiable disciplinary goals: an examination and understanding of the function of political processes, and critical thinking.

Charles Beard argued for this shift to the behavioral approach. Beard studied groups acting within an institution and argued this was necessary for observing real human behavior (Beard [1908], 1993, 114). The study of the state according to behavioralists included the study of political behavior and processes of power, or what Gunnell (1996) described as a return to the Madisonian idea of the political behavior of groups in society (factions); an idea later referred to as pluralistic democracy. As Gunnell explained, these proponents of change (Beard and Bentley)

“noted that ‘government’ could be construed generically as equivalent to politics or the interrelation and adjustment between groups, but most narrowly, it referred to a particular structure that performed certain functions” (Gunnell, 256). Building on Bentley’s work on group conflict, Beard (1913) described politics as a competition between economic interests, thus studying and analyzing those interests would contribute to an understanding of political processes. In 1919 Laski “...turned to pluralism as both a ‘realistic’ account of politics and as the basis of a new democratic theory” arguing that “the state had no special moral authority and was only one of a variety of associations and groups to which individuals belonged” (Gunnell, 257). The evolution of pluralism and the study of political processes, according to Gunnell, occurred as more theorists worked to build ideas of group interaction with the state and within the democratic process (Dickenson 1930; Herring 1929 and 1940).

According to Easton (1985), theories and debates about pluralism bridged the traditional and behavioral approaches. He explained that the discipline fully moved into the behavioral phase after World War II. This phase or approach emphasized the scientific method as a means to discover truth and fact in order to build theory.<sup>7</sup> Easton explained that during this time there was a “construction of empirically oriented theory at various levels of analysis” such as “power pluralism, which offers a positive theory... found in game theory or public choice theory” (1985, 138). Easton

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<sup>7</sup> Citing Easton (1965, 7) Chilcote explained Easton’s critique about this approach relying too heavily on a descriptive rather than empirical methodology. He explained the major tenets of behavioralism as: “(1) *regularities* or uniformities in political behavior, which can be expressed in generalizations or theory; (2) *verification* or the testing of the validity of such generalizations or theory; (3) *techniques* for seeking and interpreting data; (4) *quantification* and measurement in the recording of data; (5) *values* as distinguished between propositions relating to ethical evaluation and those relating to empirical explanation; (6) *systematization* of research; (7) *pure science*, or the seeking of understanding and explanation of behavior before utilization of knowledge for solution of societal problems; and (8) *integration* of political research with that of other social sciences” (57).

traced the shift to behavioralism in the 1950s and 1960s and characterized this shift as a natural evolution from the tired descriptions of the traditional approach to using scientific instruments “where the theoretical rather than the social criteria set the problems of research” (138).

Behavioralism was accompanied by innovative research methods including measuring actions and activities such as voting and non-voting patterns, participation and the socialization of groups, or what David Truman referred to as “interest groups” (1951). Truman built upon the idea of pluralist democracy in his theory explaining that group behavior in the political system could be empirically measured. Adding to these ideas, theorists began to debate the question “who rules America?” or “who governs?” (Dahl 1961; Mills 1956; Hunter 1953). This debate between elite theorists (Mosca, Pareto, Mills) and pluralists (Dahl, Polsby, Lindblom) centered on the nature of democracy and the power of groups. Dahl argued that group competition could be understood by analyzing policy outcomes. He did not see policy outcomes as the results of elite interests (Dahl 1961). On the other hand, Harold Lasswell (1941) discussed “power” as the manipulation of the public by the elite, and that political science and its practitioners (including specialists in the social sciences) had the responsibility “to give eyes, ears, hands and feet morality” by which to protect the vulnerable citizen (Lasswell [1941], 1993, 164).

The behavioral era represented growth in the body of political science and compelled the discipline to further consider its purpose. To restate, behavioralism embodied the idea of function or how politics worked by coming to empirical conclusions about causalities and results explaining the function of organization and

processes. Out of behavioralism came the disciplinary goal: the importance of understanding how politics works (including the formation, identification, and application of models), or the understanding of political processes. This examination of processes and emphasis on the scientific method was also imbued with the significance of critical thinking, a final disciplinary goal.

The behavioral era in political science not only emphasized scientific methodological approaches in the discipline, but also ushered in the concept of critical thinking. Civic education, a persistent goal from the traditional era, required one who not only possesses an understanding of political processes (of the behavioral era), but one who can analyze policy issues and understand their consequences. As a goal of political science, building such knowledge requires a rigorous study of societal problems and seeking solutions to these problems using sound research methods. These methods, emerging from the behavioral era, require identifying, understanding, and analyzing problems, and considering alternative perspectives and approaches in order to come up with the best solutions. This process represents critical thinking.

Bell (1960) described the shift from the traditional to the behavioral eras as a time of unchallenged liberal-conservative ideology, denoting the historical context of assumed neutrality in academia, or what he referred to as “the end of ideology.”<sup>8</sup> Easton added that for academia, reverting to the ivory towers of research under the guise of neutrality was an environment free of social responsibility. Eventually critical thinking, by name, found its way into the discipline’s curriculum which

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<sup>8</sup> Easton noted that McCarthyism was also an important element of this historical context, though not in and of itself responsible for the behavioral revolution.

(accompanying the scientific method for research), informed an emphasis on the importance of observing human behavior, the objective analysis of this behavior, and the development of critical thinking individuals in service to society.<sup>9</sup> A disciplinary emphasis on critical thinking was also the recommendation of the 1951, behavioral era, APSA Committee for the Advancement of Teachers and Goals for Political Science. This Committee “called for a more integrated curriculum that would help foster the ‘characteristics of the good democratic citizen’” (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez, 662; Wahlke 1991, 49). More of these curricular developments are addressed below.

#### *Political Processes and Critical Thinking in the Curriculum*

Unlike the era that preceded it, the behaviorist approach encouraged more “measurable” knowledge and established the importance of understanding objectively how politics worked. In their review of the history of curricular recommendations to the discipline, Ishiyama et al. explained the 1926 argument of Robert Story of Pomona College who called for a curriculum which was “candid, objective, scientific, and explanatory,” contributing to the “age-long dream of a great society of free men (and women) in a free state” (1926, 428 in Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez, 661). Story recommended the integration of political science coursework covering scientific methods and inquiry. On the final pages of an issue of the 1926 *American Political Science Review*, Story called for political science courses to include more than rote description of institutions, and instead introduce the student to thorough

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<sup>9</sup> This review does not assume that the elements of critical thinking were absent in the previous eras, simply that this specific nomenclature was not invoked during the traditional or behavioral eras.



political inquiry by teaching research methods and analysis techniques (Story 1926, 419-428).

While still promoting the importance of establishing political knowledge (one disciplinary goal) the 1915 Committee of Seven also recommended that the discipline incorporate a study of political processes: “the merits of instruction [were] on the basis of function rather than on description of governmental institutions” (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 661). In order to improve foundational coursework in the discipline, Story recommended a course that blended interdisciplinary and historical approaches. He described a multi-semester introductory course that taught modes of inquiry from the physical and life sciences and then directed students to use the scientific method design to explain not only political phenomenon, but social control at every level of politics: “With such an introduction, the teacher of political science has at his command an immense laboratory comprising the controls of group and campus life as well as those of state and nation. The scientific method is shown to be available for the description and explanation of political phenomena” (1926, 427).

Establishing an understanding of political processes using a behaviorist or scientific method approach reflects higher order learning, and, as such, critical thinking. The concept of critical thinking also appeared up in the work of Walter Laves’ and in the work of the 1942 Committee of the American Political Science Association on War-time Changes in the Political Science Curriculum (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 661). This work called for: (1) “an undergraduate curriculum whose purpose was to cultivate critical thinking skills” and the need “to produce men and women of ‘keen insight and critical judgment;’” (2) “a more

sequenced and structured curriculum;” and, (3) a “political science curriculum... supportive of civic education” (661-662). During this era the idea was not to espouse or promote ideas and values such as democracy or equality, but to engage in inquiry rooted solidly in empirically reliable scientific research (Somit and Tanenhaus, 1967). The behavioral method of inquiry paved the way for advancing additional methodological approaches that grew into post-behavioralism. Leonardo later added that rigorous inquiry contributed to critical thinking: “In quality education, critical inquiry functions to cultivate students' ability to question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation” (1999).

This review shows the value of the scientific method and inquiry behavioralism brought to political science. It also explains how critical thinking fits into this era evident in the recommendations made to the discipline during this history. These recommendations were not without critiques. Ishiyama, et al. explain that these recommendations to the discipline were criticized for advocating citizenship indoctrination rather than critical inquiry. As a result, formalizing these disciplinary recommendations in political science curriculum did not immediately occur. Rather such conversations and debates slowly permeated the discipline's curriculum where civic education, knowledge of politics, knowledge of political processes, and critical thinking eventually received greater acceptance as fundamental and interconnected disciplinary goals.

To restate, the following disciplinary goals have been identified in the examination of the discipline's history: students will attain knowledge about political systems; students will gain an understanding of political processes; students will learn

to be good citizens; and, students will develop critical thinking skills. These goals undergo further development during the discipline's post-behavioral era.

### **Post-Behavioral Approach**

Dissatisfaction towards behavioralism was presented by post-behavioralists in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> The source of this dissatisfaction accompanied the intellectual currents ushered in by “neo-Marxism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism” and the social movements of the 1960s -1980s, “including pacifism, feminism, environmentalism, postcolonialism, and the gay and lesbian liberation movements” (Barrow, 313). David Easton, cited by Barrow, explained this as a “deep dissatisfaction with political research and teaching, especially of the kind that is striving to convert the study of politics into a more rigorously scientific discipline modeled on the methodology of the natural sciences” (Easton 1969, 1051; in Barrow, 313). The discipline during this era was compelled to examine the problems of society more than the debates over methodology. During this era, the assumption of disciplinary neutrality or objectivity was considered irresponsible in the face of societal problems. It could be argued, however, that these approaches paved the way for a still adolescent discipline to reexamine one of its foundational purposes: to educate the public by prescribing to them the correct concepts of a liberal democratic civic education. This era also marked the advancement of critical thinking by including diverse perspectives on society and politics.

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<sup>10</sup> “The field of normative political theory was largely immune to the behavioral revolution and operated as a critic from without, which ultimately served to marginalize it from the accepted approach of the discipline” (Duvall 1999).

The ideas of post-behavioralism “represented the awakening of the modern world to the dangers of rapid and unregulated industrialization, ethnic and sexual discrimination, worldwide poverty, and nuclear war” (Easton 1969, 141). The challenge posed by post-behavioralism centered on questions about the sources of funding for behavioralism’s research and how that funding related to the discipline’s supposed neutrality on social issues. More specifically, Easton explained: “For the social scientists, it raised the question as to why we were unable to foresee the kinds of problems that became salient in this period [e.g., the civil rights movement, protests and unconventional political participation, inequality, riots, etc.]...and “how it happened that they did nothing about them?” (1969, 142) As a result, the content of the discipline of political science began to reflect the social upheavals of the time and the perspectives of voices previously absent from political discourse. Chilcote (1994) cited Easton who argued that “the intellectual must put knowledge to work and engage in reshaping society, and enter the struggles of the day and participate in the politicalization of the professions and academic institutions” (58, [1969]). The discipline emerged from this era with the inclusion of new ideas for students to consider in their analysis of politics. This inclusion also brought changes to curricular development.

#### *Civic Education and Critical Thinking in Post-Behavioral Curricula*

During the post-behavioral era, the discipline of political science encountered an influx of more diverse scholars, new scholarly approaches, and previously ignored dissent. This influx challenged the behaviorist emphasis on the research and investigative tools used by the discipline and instead focused more on the relevance

of what was being studied. During this time the field grew with scholars, calling for the scholarship to move beyond “participant-observer” status (White [1950] 1993, 225). This era of post-behavioralism was a call to action for political scientists to become part of the solutions to unjust human conditions.<sup>11</sup> Scholars increasingly took their research in diverse directions using units of analysis such as race, class, sex, and gender, and integrating issues of inequality into the curriculum.

Post-behavioralism also emphasized a political education that resonated with the past. In his work on post-behavioral approaches, White (1950) advocated for the discipline to produce social managers to educate the world of the American way. Concurrently, the 1962 APSA’s Committee on Standards of Instruction report on curriculum, “Political Science as a Discipline,” called for sequencing political science curriculum along the lines of four distinct subfields while emphasizing critical thinking (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 662, Kaufman-Osborn 2006).<sup>12</sup> According to Duvall, the political science subfields each had “a special language and technique that made intercommunication difficult and often without purpose. These subfields rapidly grew into self-contained entities within the field of political science” (1999).

During the post-behavioral era the goal of political knowledge remained a unifying tenet of the discipline, though political knowledge was dispersed among a plethora of expertise (Duvall 1999). The discipline’s emphasis on another political

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<sup>11</sup> This era included the goals of the discipline: civic education and critical thinking. The concept of “citizen” coupled with the concept of critical thinking, means engaging in active critique and evaluation, and solving problems of the state and public policies. This is more in the vein of Wahlke’s “education for citizenship.”

<sup>12</sup> Kaufman-Osborn (2006) presented a history and analysis of the fields of political science and the subsequent proliferation of the discipline’s areas and subfields (i.e., American government, comparative government, international relations, political theory). This is important research and only treated superficially in this study.

science goal, civic education, also persisted in this era by emphasizing conventional political participation (i.e., voting) and unconventional political participation (i.e., political activism, attending demonstrations and protests). The idea of creating leaders for U.S. democracy was also persevered in the curriculum. The post-behavioral era continued to perpetuate the disciplinary goals of political knowledge (systems and processes), civic education. Critical thinking underscored these goals as the discipline increasingly included of diverse perspectives and voices in the curriculum.

### **Recommendations to the Discipline of Political Science and Curricular Implications**

This research into the history of political science as a discipline has allowed for identification of disciplinary goals and their relationship to curricular development and student learning. While the discipline has given attention to teaching and learning, the topic itself has not enjoyed intensive examination until recent years (i.e., it is not given attention as a subfield in the discipline). Since the early 1900s the American Political Science Association (APSA) has periodically advised the discipline to think deeply about teaching and student learning. The APSA has promoted conversations about curriculum and student learning in political science (Ishiyama Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 659). Yet as Ishiyama et al. point out, there are relatively few occurrences of these considerations in publications. According to a study by these authors, from 1906-1968 there were 34 articles about undergraduate education in the discipline, with 21 focusing on curricular issues (2006, 660).<sup>13</sup> In their delineation of these 21 articles, Ishiyama et al. confirmed that early curriculum

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<sup>13</sup> This is when the APSA began to publish these articles in the journal *Political Science*. The study conducted by Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez (2006) did not address graduate education. Nor will this study.

in the discipline emphasized teaching students the facts and details of institutions and government, and about civic education.<sup>14</sup> However, Ishiyama et al. also argued that attention to these goals has faded over time as faculty are faced with increasing research pressures resulting in less value and incentive being placed on teaching and learning (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 663). See also Story 1926; Laves 1940; and Walker 1948.

As Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez noted, any literature on teaching and learning in political science has been largely ignored by the discipline despite important curricular recommendations made to the discipline.<sup>15</sup> Table 3.1 lists a number of these important recommendations that represent curricular suggestions to educators in the discipline by other political science educators and practitioners. The attainment of knowledge about political systems and an understanding of how politics works (disciplinary goals) are seen in the 1915 and 1926 recommendations. The call for the development of critical thinking skills is directly evident in the 1942 and 1991 recommendations. Education for democratic citizenship is clearly recommended in the 1951 and 1962 APSA Committee reports to the discipline. The 1991 *Wahlke Report* emphasized the significance of course sequencing for political science majors. This recommendation had implications for curricular considerations and developments in the discipline which are examined in Chapter Five. The Roundtable

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<sup>14</sup> Just as it has been subject to the disciplinary debates, the discipline's curricular goals have also corresponded with political contexts such as the Depression, and post World War II era when the discipline emphasized functionalism and "scientific management" (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, 660). For example, as Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez (2006) noted, Bates's 1927 article in the *American Political Science Review (APSR)* that argued the importance of the scientific method in teaching political science which corresponds to the behavioralist approach in the discipline.

<sup>15</sup> Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006

Report of 2002 emphasized the need for articulated student learning outcomes, speaking directly to the accreditation and demands for public transparency.

**Table 3.1: Overview of Curricular Recommendations to the Discipline of Political Science**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Highlighted Recommendations</b>
1915	Committee of Seven	Standardization of political science courses to emphasize rigorous study of American government and its function, and political training of students.
1926	Russell M. Story	Creation of a more objective, scientific, political science curriculum to create critical thinkers in a democratic society.
1942	Committee of the American Political Science Association on War-time Changes in Political Science Curriculum	Sequencing the political science curriculum, structured in a way that builds critical thinking skills based on objective knowledge derived from the scientific method applied for understanding politics and for problem solving.
1951	APSA Committee for the Advancement of Teachers and Goals for Political Science	Education for democratic citizenship and public service.
1962	APSA Committee on Standards of Instruction	Standardization of the four main areas of political science by including in the curriculum an introductory course in each area with the emphasis on civic education and political participation.
1991	Liberal Learning and the Political Science Major: A Report to the Discipline [the Wahlke Report]	Cohesion of the discipline through structured course sequencing intended to build student critical thinking and analytical skills.
2002	Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science	Identification of student learning outcomes in the discipline, contributing to the culture of public accountability.



Similar to the 1962 report by the APSA a report in 1991 by a group commissioned by the APSA recommended building knowledge by improving curricular structure. Summarized by Ishiyama et al. (2006, 660) the report, written by John Wahlke, recommended, among other things,

“the curriculum should...follow an integrated and sequential course of study rather than skip around through a disconnected jumble of individual courses. The curriculum should also be broad in scope, capable of familiarizing students with the array of analytical approaches, assumptions, and methods in use in the discipline. Finally, the curriculum should culminate in a senior seminar or equivalent ‘capstone experience.’” (Wahlke [1991], 52, 2006)

There are few measurable impacts of the *Wahlke Report* on political science departments as indicated by authors who have examined the implications of the report (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006, and Kaufman-Osburn 2006). These authors revealed how political science departments began to systematically restructure their undergraduate programs using introductory courses as the building blocks for learning, and how some had integrated capstone course or an end of program experience. Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama (2001) argued that there is “greater student learning under a structured and sequenced curriculum” (658). Ishiyama and Hartlaub (2003) similarly observed a link between curricular structure and “the development of students’ abstract and critical reasoning skills” (660) in departments that integrated Wahlke’s recommendations. In short, the *Wahlke Report* claimed curricular sequencing produced desired learning results (results that include what the Committee identifies as the disciplinary goal of “education for citizenship” (1991,

50)).<sup>16</sup> While some departments have structured their curriculum in this ordered sequence, Ishiyama and Hartlaub noted that despite their findings, very few departments have structured their curriculum according to these recommendations (2003).<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

The review of the disciplinary origins from the traditional era, to behavioralism, to the post-behavioral era, shows that there are specific goals that characterize what political science educators would like political science students to learn. This list, like goals and objectives often identified by institutions of higher education (Chapter Two), provides a general framework encompassing the complexity and diversity of the discipline. In broad terms, the identified disciplinary goals are that students of political science will: (1) attain knowledge about political systems (national and international); (2) gain an understanding of political processes; (3) develop critical thinking skills; and, (4) learn to be “good citizens” (citizenship) through civic education.<sup>18</sup> The literature review has also detailed recommendations for the discipline to consider in curricular development. A continued examination of curricular structures in political science is necessary at both the undergraduate and

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<sup>16</sup> Wahlke expressed criticism of the discipline’s structure, stating: "While no longer rent by such bitter disputes, political science still lacks consensus on basic epistemological assumptions. It lacks agreement on the basic questions it should address, on the basic concepts that should guide and organize research, and on what methods of analysis to apply and when. The resulting lack of a body of empirical theory, the paucity of general introductory courses, the heterogeneity of such courses as do exist, the diverse character of higher-level courses and the loose programmatic structure tying them together constitute formidable problems, which must be addressed when considering the political science curriculum" (1991, 51).

<sup>17</sup> The authors looked at 193 institutions in ten mid-west states and found that only 18% are following the three main Wahlke recommendations. In some ways, this study research replicates Wahlke’s work.

<sup>18</sup> As previously noted, the concept of “good citizen” is being redefined in this research per the recommendations of the Wahlke *Report* and the weaving in of the critical thinking skill. See footnote 6.

graduate levels (though the later is not a focus of this research) to investigate the persistence of these disciplinary goals and recommendations.

Conversations about teaching and learning, and examination of the discipline's pedagogical evolution integrated into political science curriculum would strengthen the discipline's place in higher education and give its future scholars clearer direction and purpose. Pat Hutchings (2002) of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching argued that this conversational void at the undergraduate level was also missing at the graduate level. Reflecting the conversations' absence in political science pedagogical discourse, Hutchings showed that while many political science graduate programs produce teachers in the discipline, departments focus on research and not necessarily on training teachers. Hutchings contended:

“Graduate programs at our research universities turn out newly minted Ph.D.s who have little systematic foundation for thinking about their own work as teachers. At best, and this does matter, we give them a few tricks of the trade. Mostly we send the message that while research is something we do by building on the work of others, and indeed contributing to the work of others, teaching is something we each learn pretty much on our own and by the seat of our pants” (Clarke, et al. 2002, 223).

If political science pedagogy is largely absent from conversations in the discipline, so too are conversations about student learning. While the purpose of the discipline has evolved over the years, and while many departments now create student learning goals and objectives, a discussion of what political science students

are in fact learning, and in what curricular structure this learning is occurring, is missing. This research contributes to this conversation about student learning in political science in a number of ways and at various levels. First, it further develops the findings of Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez (2006). This research examines curricular structures which can be used for further investigating the relation between student learning and curricular structures. This research intends to contribute to the conversation within and among political science departments and educators about curricular development and what students are learning by the completion of the curriculum. Second, at the disciplinary level this research aims to provide cohesion to the broad/general goals of political science while not attempting to define the discipline in its entirety. Finally, this work strives to be a part of one of the largest topics of conversation in higher education today: what is known about student learning in institutions of higher education?

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that lies behind this study. The methodology was designed to address the primary research questions:

1. To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curriculum of political science?
2. To what extent is science student learning aligned with the goals of political science?

The research methodology utilizes a quasi-experimental research model, a combination of document analysis, content coding, and survey research techniques.

Political science program requirements and a sample of department syllabi were collected, analyzed, and coded to determine the content of curricular structures. This analysis is complemented by the use of survey methodology for gathering information about student learning. This method is quasi-experimental in that the sample of institutions varies in curricular structures and the analysis focuses on a comparison of departments that do and do not reflect disciplinary goals in their curriculum. The research design also involves posing a series of null hypotheses and examining relationships to prove or disprove each null hypothesis. Thus, the research explores specific relationships such as how a respondent's major or time in the major

relates to their knowledge of political science and experiences in the political science classroom. This methodology is described in more detail throughout this chapter.

This chapter first summarizes the assumptions that form the foundation of this study. As previously discussed, these assumptions originate within the intellectual history of the discipline of political science. Second, this chapter explains the hypotheses developed for this study, research outline and methodological approaches employed to address each hypothesis. Third, the method used to analyze the data is explained. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research methodology.

### **Foundations and Assumptions**

This research is firmly rooted in the literature that examines political science curriculum (Kaufman-Olson 2006). The areas addressed in this research center around the alignment between department curriculum, student learning, and four identified goals of political science. This research builds from, and adds to, the history of the discipline identified in the literature review.

From the review of the literature we know there are four identifiable goals in political science. Students of political science will: (1) attain knowledge about political systems (national and international); (2) gain an understanding of political processes; (3) develop critical thinking skills; and, (4) learn to be “good citizens” through civic education.<sup>1</sup> These goals mirror the discipline’s intellectual history within the traditional, behavioral, and post-behavioral eras of political science. The

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<sup>1</sup> The Wahlke Report (1991) did not recommend that the discipline “train good citizens” as previous reports recommend. However, the Report did recommend that the discipline produce “politically literate college graduates” and promotes the disciplinary goal of “education for citizenship” (50). There is no discernable difference between “education for citizenship” and how this study treats the concept of “good citizenship.”

review of the history of curricular recommendations made to the discipline in the early 1900s leads to the assumption that the disciplinary goals are present in the political science curriculum. This assumption drawn from the political science literature informs the trajectory of this study and begs for an explanation of the relationship between disciplinary goals, curriculum, and student learning in political science.

The following analysis is organized around the testing of several hypotheses. The methodology used in this research is based on a quasi-experimental model and the research questions are explored as the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis One: The goals of the discipline are identifiable within the curriculum of U.S. political science departments.

Hypothesis Two: Disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning are positively aligned.

The hypotheses will be tested and analyzed in the subsequent chapters. A more detailed explanation of the research methodology will now be presented.

Null hypotheses were formulated given their usefulness for testing the second hypothesis. The null hypotheses reflect the survey question categories measuring each of the four disciplinary goals to discover information about each of the observed categories, or survey respondent groups.

**Goal One Null Hypotheses:**

- There is no difference between political knowledge of political science majors and non-political science majors.

- There is no difference between political knowledge of first year political science majors and senior political science majors.

**Goal Two Null Hypotheses:**

- There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between political science majors and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between first year political science majors and senior political science majors.
- There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between political science majors and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between first year and senior political science majors.

**Goal Three Null Hypotheses:**

- There is no difference between political science majors and non-political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
- There is no difference between first year and senior political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
- Students in capstone and upper division courses have not engaged in more critical thinking activities than students in lower division courses.



#### **Goal Four Null Hypotheses:**

- There is no difference in the importance that political science and non-political science majors place on voting.
- There is no difference in the importance that first year and senior political science majors place on voting.
- There is no difference in participating in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between political science and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference in participation in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between first year and senior political science majors.
- There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between political science and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between first year and senior political science majors.

The null hypotheses were tested using *t*-tests and measures of significance, explained in more detail later in this chapter.

Exploration of the two hypotheses begins with the process of gathering data from a sample of political science departments generated through a query within the

Carnegie Foundation categories.<sup>2</sup> This sample was drawn first by narrowing the Carnegie criteria to identify a manageable number of institutions. The sample was then filtered by institutions offering a distinct political science program, as opposed to degree programs that blended political science curriculum with other disciplines such as criminal justice or economics. Sample filtering proceeded through these steps; selected schools had to have the following characteristics:

1. Four year colleges and universities in the United States (not including outlying regions) were selected.<sup>3</sup>
2. Public institutions. Public institutions represent the engine for civic education in the United States (Galston 2001, 24). These institutions are charged to serve a broad range of students. They are also subject to similar standards established by the regional accreditation bodies. Private schools are not included in this research since they are subject to different influences and standards, and may attract a narrower range of students.
3. Undergraduate programs including degrees in the arts and sciences, with “some” to “high” presence of graduate programs. This classification was chosen to include schools that emphasize broader program opportunities along with a political science degree (i.e., those departments offering pre-law, criminal justice, or public administration). The presence of graduate studies also contributes to the conversation about teaching and learning (Hutchings 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> The Carnegie classification system changed in 2006. Basic Carnegie classifications are still available. The new classification schema now allows for nuanced comparisons based on new categories useful for researchers. According to Jaschik: “Carnegie officials said their hope was that the range of comparisons would encourage colleges to find true peer institutions and then learn from them” (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Outlying regions were filtered for the sake of geographical convenience. This did not preclude any schools fitting other categories from the research. The focus of this research is U.S. institutions of higher education not community colleges or two year institutions as these institutions do not offer bachelor’s degrees in political science.

4. High to very high undergraduate enrollment profile. Since the focus is undergraduate curriculum and undergraduate political science students, it was important to include institutions that serve a large number of students.
5. The undergraduate profiles of these schools are medium to full time, four year, higher transfer-in, and selective admissions campuses. Larger state schools tend to enroll more transfer students, and including a range of such schools across the country was important to meeting the goals of this research. The transfer component poses a challenge for assessment. For example, what knowledge are these students bringing from their previous institutions. The implications for this research are nominal since this research on student learning is discipline, more than department, focused. Including schools that have “selective” admittance policies ensures that all students meet admissions criteria and began their programs at relatively equivalent levels of competency.
6. The size and setting of the schools selected are medium to large, and include a greater number of non-residential students. A largely non-residential population tends to be more diverse in age and socio-economic background than primarily residential campuses (Carnegie 2008).

The initial query from the Carnegie website generated a list of 50 institutions which, using the criteria as filters, was narrowed down to 42 institutions (see Appendix A). The list of institutions was narrowed further to 41 when one institution was not allowed to participate in external research without separate institutional review and approval. This situation is explained in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter Seven. Data was then gathered from the institutions fitting these

criteria. This data provided information about how political science curricula and student learning align to specific disciplinary goals.

The use of the Carnegie classification does not assume that these institutions or political science departments are identical. The assumption, derived from the literature and the recommendations to the discipline, is that there are common goals within the discipline of political science and these goals may be present in the curriculum across political science departments (regardless of their number of faculty or student enrollment), and in political science student learning around the country.

The next section of this chapter details the research methods for testing each hypothesis in this study.

### **Research Hypotheses and Methodology**

The first hypothesis, the goals of the discipline are identifiable within the curriculum of U.S. political science departments, is derived from the first research question. This hypothesis was tested using an inductive methodological approach occurring in two parts: (1) examination of the curricular pathways of different political science departments, and (2) examination of the alignment of course student learning outcomes with disciplinary goals.

The first approach to testing this hypothesis involved an examination of the curricula of 41 political science departments by looking at requirements of course sequencing and student learning outcomes. This direction of this analysis is informed by the work of Kaufman-Osborn (2006) who engaged in a similar study of 50 undergraduate political science programs. In his study, Kaufman-Osborn examined how departments integrates the subfields of the discipline into students' major

programs of study.<sup>4</sup> The method used in this dissertation takes a comparable approach by charting similarities and differences among political science departments. In addition to looking for the presence of the course requirements and course sequencing, this study analyzed the presence of departmental student learning outcomes. As discussed, the importance of these elements emerges from almost a century of recommendations and reports to the discipline (see Table 3.1).

Information about course offerings was available in institution's catalogs and on course websites in the form of "program of study" documents. Looking at the curricular structures of departments revealed similarities, such as broad introductory course offerings, special topics courses, and requirements of one or more courses from the main disciplinary subfields. Curricula also tended to include the presence of a required end of program or capstone course.

Department curriculum was documented and compared to curriculum from other departments. Patterns emerged from these comparisons of the presence of disciplinary goals. If department requirements for the political science major were similar, and reflected these goals, then a course sequencing model was identified and noted. Models were then evaluated for the presence of the disciplinary goals and recommendations to the discipline that embody these goals: Did curricula include introductory courses in American politics and courses across subfields? Did curricula require research methods courses? Was there an end of program or capstone course

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<sup>4</sup> After examining political science departments at 50 institutions, Kaufman-Osborn concluded that, for good or bad, despite the perception of fragmentation within the discipline as noted in the discipline's development, there is an identifiable basic curricular structure organized around the four main political science subfields (American politics, international relations, comparative politics, and political theory).

requirement? The integration of these goals into curricula could then be related to student learning.<sup>5</sup>

Testing the first hypothesis also included utilizing an inductive approach. Curricular structures were examined for the presence of four disciplinary goals. This researcher anticipated the difficulty in finding this information as this required active assistance from members of the political science departments included in the study. For this reason, a case study of course syllabi from one representative department was included in this study. A mid-size institution and political science department from the Carnegie classification was helpful and forthcoming with providing archived documents. A detailed examination of this department's curriculum and syllabi helped establish the link between curriculum, course outcomes, and disciplinary goals.<sup>6</sup> This snapshot demonstrates a typical curricular pathway for political science students, and the extent to which curriculum aligns with disciplinary goals. Syllabi analyzed came from courses offered between the years 2007-2009. The purpose of including syllabi from these years was to capture information from courses not offered every semester or academic year.

Once collected, each syllabus was analyzed for information referring to disciplinary goals and student learning outcomes. This data was maintained using a spreadsheet format.<sup>7</sup> This research initially focused on introductory (e.g., 100 and 200 level courses) and end of program or capstone courses but moved into a more in-

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<sup>5</sup> As noted in the review of the literature, Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama (2001) linked curricular structuring to the development student learning, such as critical thinking.

<sup>6</sup> As stated earlier in this chapter, the original intent of this study was to collect a sample of syllabi from the 41 identified institutions. The collection of said course syllabi proved to be difficult as departments did not respond to the researcher's requests for access to these documents. A more in depth analysis of the syllabi from one institution provided an adequate curricular snapshot.

<sup>7</sup> For example, some syllabi listed student learning outcomes that related to the disciplinary goals. Other syllabi required deeper reading.

depth examination of most courses in the curricular pathway. In addition to looking at course goals and student learning outcomes, other indicators of alignment to disciplinary goals were sometimes found in class assignments and included in the documentation (see Table 5.2).

In the examination of syllabi, curricular structuring was further reviewed. This review included looking for evidence of course sequencing around the development of skills or competencies, and associated with disciplinary goals. For instance, did early introductory courses emphasize political knowledge while later courses emphasize critical thinking? Or, alternatively were disciplinary goals evidenced throughout the curriculum spanning from introductory to end of program course offerings?

As Wahlke pointed out, and what needs to be reiterated here in terms of course sequencing and curricular models, is that, “we have no ‘model curriculum’ to offer. The recommendations ... embody our conception of goals, standards, criteria which we think should guide political science program thinking in any institution.” He continued: “Copying some ‘canned program’ of some ideal-type major is unlikely to improve student’s political education” (Wahlke 1991, 54). The examination of syllabi in this research did not focus solely on the presence of one curricular model or another, but curriculum directed towards the development of skills over a series of courses. The presence of all disciplinary goals in one course did not seem likely, but the sequencing of courses building outcomes leading to these goals seemed possible.

The second component of this study examines political science student learning. We turn now to the consideration of how student learning aligns with disciplinary goals.

As demands for assessment data have increased, and as institutions of higher education and departments face challenges in collecting assessment data, there is increased interest by academics and researchers in evaluating student learning. As discussed in Chapter Two, the assessment literature in higher education calls for defining the alignment between courses, department or program goals, and institutional goals. This research adds an additional layer of assessment: demonstrating student learning alignment at the disciplinary level.

The second hypothesis, that the disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning are positively reflected in the classroom, is derived from the second research question. This hypothesis was tested using survey methodology with questions designed around the four disciplinary goals. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain student learning within these goals. Students from the sample institutions were targeted and their participation in the survey was solicited.

In order to examine hypothesis two, a survey of college students at 41 institutions was conducted.<sup>8</sup> This survey was approved by the Northern Arizona University Institutional Research Board (IRB) in spring 2009. The protocol of this survey is provided in Appendix B. Upon completing the IRB requirements, the target population was invited to participate in the survey.

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<sup>8</sup> Students at 41 institutions were solicited for this survey, though the majority of survey respondents came from four institutions.



Political science departments from the identified sample were contacted and invited to participate in this study. Subsequent to this initial contact, letters and flyers were sent to the selected institutions. Department chairs and administrative assistants were requested to post the flyer in their departments and distribute them to all department faculty. Faculty members were asked to announce the survey in the political science classes. Students in the introductory and end of program courses were the intended primary target audience for this study. Each institution received between 20-50 flyers depending on the size of their department. These flyers explained the study, provided the primary investigator's contact information, and provided the link to the online survey.

An incentive to take the survey was offered to encourage a higher rate of participation. This incentive was an opportunity to win one of four \$50 gift cards to Barnes and Noble. Students were informed that upon the completion of the survey, there would be an opportunity to enter a drawing for one of these cards. The last question of the survey directed respondents to a separate survey area where participants could provide their email address separate from their survey answers. In this manner, no identifying information was associated with individual surveys. While there was initial concern that students might take the survey multiple times to increase their chances in the drawing, respondents were required to enter their email address for the survey drawing. After the data collection period closed, these email addresses were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and examined for duplication. Of more than the 200 drawing entries only four duplicate email addresses

appeared.<sup>9</sup> The extra addresses were scrubbed from the data. From these entries, four email addresses were randomly drawn and winners were notified via email during spring 2009. Winners replied to the emails with their home mail address and the gift cards were sent from the Barnes and Noble website. Email addresses were deleted upon completion of the drawing.

Although the incentive helped get students to take the survey, the anticipated survey response rate was not achieved. Reaching a desired sample size constituted one of the biggest challenges to this research. The researcher had difficulty reaching department chairs and only a handful of department chairs responded to requests to involve students and departments in this study. One department required obtaining their institution's IRB approval before they would tell their students about the survey. Completing separate IRB processes beyond this researcher's home institution was impractical. As a result, this department was omitted from the sample. Many departments simply did not respond to repeated requests for participation. In all 245 survey responses were received. Most respondents were from political science departments located at four institutions. The margin of error associated with this survey response number is approximately 6.4 percent. The margin of error is higher for the survey respondent subgroups analyzed in this study. While the response rate was adequate to describe these populations, it was not robust enough to apply more sophisticated statistical tests.

The survey was available online at <[www.SurveyMonkey.com](http://www.SurveyMonkey.com)>. The Survey Monkey site provided an accessible interface for uploading questions and for respondents to take surveys. The site offers crosstabulation and filter tools useful for

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<sup>9</sup> It cannot be assumed that the same student took the survey more than once.

collecting and analyzing responses. Survey responses can be downloaded into Microsoft Excel files for sorting and charting. Students were asked to take the survey only once if they were enrolled in more than one political science class. Every student who took the survey was administered the same questions.

The survey content was designed to serve two purposes: to assess actual student knowledge, and to assess student perception of their learning. The survey also measured for the presence or absence of the four disciplinary goals within student learning. Survey questions operationalized the goals with a series of questions being posed within each goal area. Questions were closed-ended and required respondents to select answers using multiple choice questions. Respondents were also asked to answer demographic questions including their major and their year of study (e.g., freshman or senior). Respondents were asked to identify their current level of political science coursework and their institution of enrollment. This information constitutes the independent variables of the study.

One important assumption in this research design is that the first year student data could be used as baseline information about knowledge and perceptions of the discipline.<sup>10</sup> An additional assumption is that senior political science students at the end of their program have been exposed to the curriculum of the department where they engaged in the bulk of their coursework. Information collected from students at the end of their coursework can be used to assess student knowledge or their perceptions after exposure to the coursework. Using the logic of a quasi-experimental research design, crosstabulating and comparing responses between first year and

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<sup>10</sup> "Perception" refers to the survey questions asking students to discuss their learning experience.

fourth year students is interpreted as an indication of student learning within the curriculum. The complete survey questionnaire is presented in Appendix C.

The first series of survey questions probed “political knowledge,” thus encompassing elements of the first two disciplinary goals: (1) students will attain knowledge about political systems (national and international); and (2) students will gain an understanding of how politics works. Questions in this category intended to measure beliefs and respondent knowledge about general political concepts and political processes. The second type of question measured “learning experience and reflection” and thus examples of the third and fourth disciplinary goals: (3) students will develop critical thinking skills; and, (4) students will learn to be good citizens through civic education. These questions intended to capture respondent behaviors, that is, what they had done in their political science coursework.

For example, measurement of civic education was included in the survey as questions about respondent attitudes and experiences. As shown in Chapter Two, the theme of civic education permeates the historical development of political science from the traditional to the post-behavioral eras, and is seen from theories of political education to critical participation. Like critical thinking, capturing elements of civic responsibility and citizenship in survey questions is difficult. In order to gauge this area using the survey method, survey participants were asked attitudinal questions about the importance they placed on political participation, and experiential questions about their experiences with different forms of political participation. For example, one question about experience with service learning was included given the argument

that service learning, or service pedagogy, offers students an opportunity for civic engagement.

### **Data Analysis**

Question responses were aggregated as either indexes or scales (depending on question type) to provide an overall measurement of the acquisition of each disciplinary goal. An index is “a type of composite measure that summarizes and rank-orders several specific observations and represents some more general direction” (Babbie 2007, 154). For questions with correct versus incorrect answers, correct answers were assigned a score based on their face validity (each correct answer was scored 1, each incorrect answer was score 0). Demographic questions were also coded. Responses identifying political science as a major was scored 1 and responses identifying non-political science majors were scored 0. First year political science students were coded as 1 and senior political science students were coded as 4. The levels of courses were also coded: 100-200 level courses were 1; upper division courses were 2; end of program or senior capstone courses were 3. Responses were then calculated from these composite indexes.

Survey responses were then analyzed for empirical relationships. Such relationships are “established when respondents’ answers to one question... help us predict how they’ll answer other questions” (Babbie 2007. 157). The categorization of questions by disciplinary goal represented bivariate relationships; the responses to each question in the categories convey the acquisition of student knowledge through the curriculum. These relationships are presented as percentages and using the correlation coefficients, *t*-tests and *p*-values that measure the extent and degree of

relationships.<sup>11</sup> If a *t*-test indicated significant difference, then the null hypothesis (that there is no relationship between the two observed categories) was rejected. If no significant difference emerged between the observed categories which were compared using the *t*-test, then the null hypothesis was proven. For scaled questions, response items were weighted equally and then analyzed to determine how answers addressed the related disciplinary goal.

Survey respondents were coded according to the respondent's major and their year of study (if they were students in their first or last years in their political science major). Political science majors comprised 76 percent of respondents. Non-political science majors comprised 24 percent of survey respondents. First year political science majors made up 22 percent of the total survey respondents. Senior political science majors represented 31 percent of the respondents.<sup>12</sup> Political science majors enrolled in an end of program or capstone class were 11 percent of the survey respondents.<sup>13</sup> Responses were filtered to differentiate political science from non-political science majors, and to distinguish respondents by year of study (first-year and senior year respondents).

Comparing the different sizes of the groups required calculating *p*-values. For instance, *t*-tests are used to determine relationships between variables when sample sizes are not equal, and for testing nominal and interval data. The *t*-test "evaluates the

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<sup>11</sup> ANOVA and Cramer's V statistical techniques are also used to determine relationships and test null hypotheses.

<sup>12</sup> Since 100 level courses may have fewer declared political science majors, students in 200 level courses were included with the intent to capture the first year students who have or intended to declare their major.

<sup>13</sup> Assessing student learning at this level is justified by Barr and Tagg who recommend that assessment begin in the classroom in order to inform how programs measure student learning. They argued: "The place to start the assessment of learning outcomes is in the conventional classroom; from there, let the practice grow to the program and institutional levels" (1995).

differences in means between two groups” (StatSoft 2010). To calculate the significance of relationship between two variables required running the *t*-test first required finding the mean in the data.<sup>14</sup> The *t*-test also involved finding the probability of error, or *p*-value.<sup>15</sup> Calculating the probability of error requires presenting a null hypothesis that assumes no relationship exists between two categories of observations (i.e., comparing how first year and senior political science majors answer a question). The *p*-value result determined if the null hypothesis can be rejected or proven. The *t*-test allowed for determining whether there were significant differences in the responses of one group compared to another. Using the *t*-test method required formulating null hypotheses for each disciplinary goal tested.<sup>16</sup>

The data resulting from these calculations was examined for the presence of any relationship between the disciplinary goals and the results of student self-reports about their learning. Chapters Five and Six of this study illustrate and present the analysis of data. Chapter Seven draws conclusions about the data findings in relation to the research questions and provides recommendations for future directions in this topic area.

In sum, this research is based on testing and analyzing two hypotheses, the second of which includes a series of null hypotheses. These null hypotheses are tested and analyzed for relationships between respondent groups and student learning. The following table presents a summary of the hypotheses, null hypotheses, and the methods employed to examine them. The two research questions, accompanying

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<sup>14</sup> This research relies on data at nominal, ordinal and interval levels. Calculation of the mean is useful for heuristic purposes.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics for this research were calculated using the statistical software, SPSS (2009).

<sup>16</sup> See Babbie’s discussion on nonequivalent group design (359).

hypotheses, null hypotheses, and methodologies are summarized in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

**Table 4.1: Overview of Research Question One, Hypotheses One, and Methodology**

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**Research Question One:**

To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curriculum of political science?

**Hypothesis One:**

The goals of the discipline are identifiable within the curriculum of U.S. political science departments.

**Methodology:**

1. An examination of the curricular pathways of different political science departments; and,
  2. An examination of the alignment of course student learning outcomes with disciplinary goals.
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**Table 4.2: Overview of Research Question Two, Hypotheses Two, and Methodology**

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**Research Question Two:**

To what extent is science student learning aligned with the goals of political science?

**Hypothesis Two:**

Disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning are positively reflected in the classroom.

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**Goal One: Students will attain knowledge about political systems.**

**Null Hypotheses:**

1. There is no difference between political knowledge of political science and non-political science majors.
  2. There is no difference between political knowledge of first year and senior political science majors.
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**Goal Two: Students will gain an understanding of political processes.**

**Null Hypotheses:**

1. There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between political science and non-political science majors.
2. There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between first year and senior political science majors.
3. There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between political science and non-political science majors.
4. There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between first year and senior political science majors.

**Goal Three: Students will develop critical thinking skills.**

**Null Hypotheses:**

1. There is no difference between political science and non-political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
2. There is no difference between first year and senior political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
3. Students in capstone and upper division courses have not engaged in more critical thinking activities than students in lower division courses.

**Goal Four: Students will learn to be “good citizens” (citizenship) through civic education.**

**Null Hypotheses:**

1. There is no difference in the importance that political science and non-political science majors place on voting.
  2. There is no difference in the importance that first year and senior political science majors place on voting.
  3. There is no difference in participating in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between political science and non-political science majors.
  4. There is no difference in participation in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between first year and senior political science majors.
  5. There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between political science and non-political science majors.
  6. There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between first year and senior political science majors.
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**Methodology:**

Survey methodology with questions designed around the four disciplinary goals.  
Responses of compared by testing null hypotheses.

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**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**ANALYSIS ONE: CURRICULAR**  
**ALIGNMENT WITH DISCIPLINARY GOALS**

**Introduction**

This chapter addresses the first hypothesis of this study: the goals of the discipline are identifiable within the curriculum of U.S. political science departments. Testing this hypothesis required examining curricular structures at the departmental level, and analyzing course syllabi for the presence of curricular alignment. This chapter: (1) examines the curricular pathways offered by different political science departments; and, (2) assesses the degree of existing alignment between specific course student learning outcomes and disciplinary goals. The snapshot of curricular alignment presented in this chapter illustrates how political science departments and political science courses address the identified goals of the discipline.

Foremost among the literature on curricular structures is the work of Ishiyama and Breuning (2008), and Kaufman-Osborn (2006). These authors established the framework that informs the examination of the curricular structures from various political science departments. In their work, Ishiyama and Breuning examined a national sample of political science departments to understand how student learning outcomes were integrated into political science in the curriculum. Similarly, Kaufman-Osborn (2006) analyzed the creation of and debates around the delineation of political science subfields. Kaufman-Osborn looked at how the arrangement of these subfields has implications for curricular structures in the discipline. Both studies

inform the analysis presented in this chapter. The analysis contributes to the conversation about curricular structuring in the discipline of political science. Specifically, this chapter examines how goals promoted in the classroom, department, and at disciplinary levels fit together or align with department curricula. This chapter includes an assessment of this alignment using the following criteria:

1. Are curricular structures (course sequencing) organized around identified goals of the discipline; and,
2. Do curricular structures (course sequencing) reflect the recommendations made to the discipline (Table 3.1)?

Research findings suggest that identifiable curricular structures appear in the political science degree-program requirements at a sampling of political science departments. This finding confirms Kaufman-Osborn's (2006) research findings of a defined curricular structure in political science requirements. Further, an analysis of curricular structures shows three curricula models prevalent within the sample of political science departments. Curricular structures and course requirements appear to align to the recommendations made to the discipline throughout its history.

## **Part I: Curricular Structures**

### **Identifiable Curricular Structures**

The framework used to analyze the findings around the first hypothesis is rooted in the theories of education and history of political education presented in Chapters Two and Three. The work of Kaufman-Osborn (2006) established the contours for this analysis. Kaufman-Osborn looked at curricular structures of political science departments and the presence of the disciplinary subfields. This research

takes Kaufman-Osborn's work further by examining identifiable similarities and differences in curricular pathways for political science majors and relates these curricular pathways to recommendations made to the discipline throughout its history. The guiding question of this analysis is: To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curricula of political science?

#### *Required Foundational and End of Program Courses*

What emerged from the examination of curricula was the presence of specific foundational course requirements and the end of program or senior capstone course. The presence of foundational courses came from looking at political science departments' program of study documents.

Examination of data collected from the 41 political science departments included in this study found that foundational courses were present in program requirements in all the schools. The first foundational course requirement apparent tends to be a course on the introduction to American government and politics. Seventy-one percent of these programs require this course before a major can graduate with a B.A. in political science. Other foundational requirements are course specific to the disciplinary subfields: American government, comparative government, international relations, political theory. These subfield requirements were apparent at 93 percent of the departments. Kaufman-Osborn's finding about the presence of four main subfields is replicated in this study. In addition, political analysis and/or research methods courses appeared in 61 percent of the political science degree requirements. This research also examined programs for the presence of an end of program or senior capstone requirement. This requirement could take

many forms including a senior seminar or senior thesis. This type of course requirement appeared in 51 percent of the departments examined. The data from this examination of political science course requirements for degree seeking students is presented in Table 5.1. The significance of this information is discussed further in this chapter.

**Table 5.1 Foundational Course Requirements for the Political Science Major from Political Science Departments**

<b>Course/Requirement</b>	<b>Departments (%) (N=41)</b>
Introduction to American government/politics	71
Introductory courses in main subfields	93
Political Science Methods	61
End of program/senior capstone	51

Table 5.1 shows that political science majors from most departments included in this research are required to take the introduction to American government and politics course. Table 5.1 also demonstrates that the majority of these departments require courses in the identified disciplinary subfields. The courses that comprise this requirement are the subfield introductory courses such as introduction to comparative politics or introduction to international relations. To fulfill this subfield requirement, student majors are directed to take three to four introductory courses. These first two requirements (American government and politics, and three to four of the subfield introductory courses) represent the core or foundations of the political science major

defined by the departments. In this study, a political science research methods class is a graduation requirement for the general political science B.A. degree in 61 percent of departments. In the other political science departments students may select this course among two or three other course choices offered such as political theory, though it is not required. Forty-nine percent of departments do not require a senior capstone (or end of program) course.

Most departments specify course requirements that reflect recommendations made to the discipline. These departments require students to take an American government and politics course, three or four introductory subfield courses, a research methods course, and a senior capstone course. How did this curricular structure come about? Looking back at curricular recommendations made to the discipline over the years provides insight into this question.

### **Curricular Recommendations: Evidence and Persistence**

The evolution and development of the discipline, and recommendations made to the discipline over the past century have been summarized in previous chapters. The ways in which these recommendations have been interpreted into current program structures deserves further analysis.

#### *Introduction to American Government and Politics Foundational Requirement*

Did the recommendations from the 1915 Committee of Seven influence the discipline enough to have resonance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The frequency of introductory American government and politics courses today in both general education and political science major requirements reflects the 1915

recommendations. The Committee of Seven called for a rigorous study of American government to be included in political science degree requirements (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez 2006). The 1915 Committee charged the discipline with this task, namely, to train more students in public administration and for leadership roles. This recommendation came amidst the context of World War I tensions and a climate of American exceptionalism stoked by policy makers. The presence of this course in political science curricula is evidence of the persistence of this recommendation.

In their 1962 report of findings to the American Political Science Association, the Committee on the Standards of Instruction reported that the introductory course, which they argued should be one in political theory, comparative theory, American institutions or the like, “will usually satisfy such general education requirements in government or the social sciences as a college or university may prescribe. At the same time, this course must satisfy the need for a foundation to later and further study of political science students...” (1962, 419). As recommended by the 1962 Committee, the introductory American government and politics course could also meet general requirements for all degrees at a university, but this course should mainly serve as a foundational course for political science majors.

The previous section explained how most departments require the introduction to American government and politics course for student majors. Many departments also offer this course as a general education requirement which students across majors take, reflecting the 1962 recommendation. Given the propensity of institutions that offer this course in fulfillment of general education or graduation requirements, political science students may take this class as a general education course

requirement and not major course requirement. In other words, it is possible that all political science majors take this course, and only 71 percent of the majors count it towards their political science degree requirements. Regardless, the presence of this course in the majority of departments' curriculum is a noteworthy contribution to a structured curricular pattern in the discipline.<sup>1</sup>

In considering this factor, data presented in Table 5.1 includes this course if it was specifically defined as a political science degree requirement. Although 71 percent of institutions require that an introduction to American government and politics course be taken, this does not necessarily translate into 71 percent of political science majors having taken this course. Unless it was clearly indicated as "required" in the student advising, program of study, or major requirement forms, the introduction to American government and politics course was not included in the count of foundational requirements for the political science major.

It is interesting to note that the presence of this political science course in general education curricula suggests that this course reaches most political science students and, broadly, undergraduate degree seeking students more than any other undergraduate political science course.<sup>2</sup> In 1993, the *Wahlke Report* noted that the "paucity of general education courses" (1993, 51) in the discipline resulted from a disunity in the curriculum and from a lack of agreement within the discipline over what was important for political science students to know. On the other hand, in some

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<sup>1</sup> Intervening factors such as transfer status, substituting exams for coursework, or completion of independent studies should be included in more in depth analyses of student learning.

<sup>2</sup> More research into this could include an examination of enrollment numbers by degree seeking major in the Introduction to American politics course across institutions. In depth case studies could include asking students to indicate why they chose to take this introductory political science course to fulfill their general education requirement. Such research could illustrate the discipline's reach into the undergraduate population, and exposure of students to the political science disciplinary goals.



cases the far reach of the introduction to American government and politics course is a product of state mandated requirements. Despite Wahlke's note and because of these frequent mandates, the introduction to American government and politics course remains steadfastly rooted in general education and disciplinary requirements at most higher education institutions.

### *Subfield Courses*

Data depicted in Table 5.1 replicates Kaufman-Osborn's finding that many political science departments require introductory courses in disciplinary subfields. This arrangement dominates the curricular structure within political science. Kaufman-Osborn suggests that as core requirements, these introductory courses represent the foundational pieces of a political science major's degree program.<sup>3</sup>

Among the 41 departments examined in this research, 93 percent direct their majors to take courses from among the four disciplinary subfields: American politics, international relations, comparative politics, and political theory. Eighty-four percent of departments require that students take the subfield courses at any point during their curricular path through the major. Sixteen percent of departments require students to complete these introductory subfield courses in their first two years. One department requires students to take three subfield introductory courses in the first two years of study: U.S. politics, comparative politics, and international politics. This department requires political science majors to use these courses to fulfill general education

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<sup>3</sup> Despite the ongoing conversations and debates about the content and definition of the discipline, political science is still identified with the four main disciplines often subsume other areas: American politics, international relations, comparative politics, and political theory (Kaufman-Osborn 2006). Political science departments will frequently add public policy or public administration to this list; others will list these areas under American politics. Some departments list law as another or separate area.

requirements. In other words, the department has designated these major courses as also fulfilling general education requirements. In addition, two departments specify that continuing coursework in the field hinges upon student grades in the introductory subfield courses. In at least one case, students must complete these courses with a grade point average of 2.3 or better before enrolling in subsequent courses in the major. This example reflects requirements at one of the more structured departments investigated in this research. The majority of departments examined require majors to take at least three introductory courses in the four main political science subfields and then require students to complete remaining units by choosing among a selection of political science courses or electives.

Another observation is that 13 percent of departments direct students to choose one or two courses from each subfield while 24 percent require students to take multiple courses in one specific area as representative of the subfield's depth rather than take courses across the subfields for breadth. In these cases, apart from department electives spanning a variety of topic areas, the program concentration was defined by one of these subfields. In such cases students take a series of course within the subfield of their choice rather than only an introductory subfield course. Only three percent of departments specify that subfield courses be among the upper division offerings.

Structuring degree requirements along the breadth and/or depth of subfield areas reflects the recommendations of the Committee on Standards of Instruction in 1962. While individual departments may choose to include the "depth" of the subfields, this Committee recommended exposing students to a "breadth" of

subfields. The 1962 Committee recommended that “the undergraduate major should be encouraged to study comparable core areas in related social science disciplines such as history, economics, and sociology” (419). Reflected in this study is the 1962 Committee’s recommendation of requiring majors to complete coursework across the range of the subfield courses.<sup>4</sup>

### *Research Methods Courses*

Another identifiable commonality among departments in this study is the requirement of political science research, methods, or political analysis foundational course.<sup>5</sup> The 1991 Task Force on the Political Science Major, chaired by John Wahlke, reported that in a 1987-1988 survey of 600 political science departments, 56 percent require a methodology course. In comparison, the review of curriculum for political science departments in this study revealed that 61 percent of departments require a course in political science methods. Among the departments it was observed that some required students take a political science methods course within the first two years of study or upon the student’s declaration of majoring in political science. Other departments require this course at the end of the major’s political science coursework. This course sometimes coincides with a senior seminar, capstone, project or other culminating course experience.

Among the 61 percent of departments requiring a methods class all required completion of the course for the political science B.A. degree. Among other

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<sup>4</sup> The 1962 APSA Committee on Standards of Instruction listed the fourth subfield as organization and law. Kaufman-Osborn’s re-naming of these categories included this subfield under “public policy.”

<sup>5</sup> While some of the political science departments recommend that their majors take math courses or statistics courses in other disciplines, such out of discipline recommendations are not specific major requirements in the departments reviewed here so were not included in this study.

departments, a research methods class is listed among two or three course choices such as political theory. Thirty-nine percent of political science departments in this study have no methods requirement in the degree program and the methods class was listed in all but one of the department catalogs. The methods course offering in the departments examined emphasizes the quantitative social science methods recommended by Russell Story in 1926.

Story's recommendation for a political science methods class was more than a curricular suggestion. Story's recommendation represented the behavioral shift occurring in the discipline at the time of writing. He was critical of the over-emphasis on the traditional focus on institutions arguing that this focus sacrificed deeper analytical approaches needed in political science. Story argued that students emerge from such study without acquiring "insight into the relation between causal factors and the political phenomena under scrutiny" (1926, 420). Story's remarks were imbued with cynicism towards a discipline that he saw as embodying the simple and debatable goal of producing citizens. Of political science students, Story contended:

"If he survives both the content and the methods of instruction he adopts one of four principal alternatives: he joins the army of vanishing voters; he joins the group of professional Fridays who stage the sham battles of American politics; he joins a hundred per cent American service club and thanks God he is not as alien as his forefathers were; or he becomes a reformer, perhaps as futile as his predecessors. Now and then he may endure to the end, become a teacher of American government, perhaps even the author of a text to

perpetuate his enlightenment among the throngs who are crowding into civic responsibility” (1926, 421-422).

Story did not simply recommend an additional foundational course to teach students skills by applying the scientific method; he called for a methods course to help students think critically about social problems.

#### *End of Program or Senior Capstone Course*

Introductory courses offered by a sample of political science departments in this study intend to create the foundational pieces of student learning in the discipline. If taken in the spirit of Story’s recommendations, at least one introductory course would teach students how to perform inquiry and analysis. Yet Story explained this training alone does not mean that students are prepared fully for performing analysis themselves. Such application, according to Wahlke, would not come until the end of political science coursework. Similar to Story’s 1926 article, the 1991 *Wahlke Report* to the discipline recommended that a research methods course be taken early in the curriculum. He likened the value of this course to the purpose of a liberal arts education. The *Wahlke Report* considered the course within a larger sequential curricular structure. Within this structure, Wahlke recommended an end of program course or project which his Task Force called the “capstone experience” (1991, 55). The Task Force provided a number of suggestions that could meet this recommendation with the intention of marking the culmination of the major’s education.

This research looked at the sample departments for presence of an end of program experience or course. The review of political science degree requirements

conducted reveals that 51 percent (Table 5.1) of institutions require a senior seminar, end of program, or a capstone course. The other institutions do not require this course or experience for graduation with a political science degree. When the Wahlke Task Force looked at department survey data from 1987-1988, presence of a senior capstone course or experience was not one of the courses included in the survey, thus comparable data is not available. This absence contributed to the Task Force's recommendation for the addition of a senior capstone course or experience to the political science curriculum. In the almost 20 years since the *Wahlke Report* and recommendations, the capstone course has become a fixture among disciplinary requirements. Whether this course requirement reveals anything about the development of skills or competency is not entirely known. Nonetheless, institutions with this requirement clearly indicate that a senior capstone (or end of program course) represents an opportunity for students to apply knowledge gained in their program of study.

The presence of the senior capstone course reflects curricular structuring recommended by the 1991 *Wahlke Report*. This research finds that a capstone course is gaining a foothold in political science curriculum. A more systematic presentation of this analysis continues with examination of patterns that allow for identification of models of curricular structures present in political science departments today.

### **Models of Course Sequencing**

With Wahlke's recommendations in mind, models of curricular structures can be identified in the data. At root, curricular models are derived from an examination of course sequencing. It is important to note limitations of this analysis. Because most

students receive individual advising in their major requirements and such advising directs how a student progresses through the major, students may complete coursework in sequences different from what is recommended by departments. Such advising is often tailored to personal interests, scheduling needs, or other variables. Furthermore, this study cannot presume to know courses completed by students who transfer into the major from another institution or program. Nevertheless, the examination of political science departments in this study reveals the presence of three curricular models capturing the degree of regimented course sequencing and structured curricular pathways.

The three curricular models emerging in this analysis include programs that are (1) very regimented (sequenced from beginning, middle, to end); (2) somewhat regimented (some sequencing); and, (3) not at all regimented. Twenty-two percent of departments examined fall into the first model. These departments prescribe specific course sequencing including a required introduction to American government and politics course, introductory courses from disciplinary subfields, and a senior capstone course or experience. Seventy-seven percent of political science departments in this study did not prescribe a “beginning, middle, end” sequence for their curriculum. Of this later group, 44 percent of departments are in the second model having three out of four of the course sequencing categories prescribed. Thirty-four percent of the curricula have no regimented course sequencing requirement in their curriculum. This observation is depicted in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 Curricular Models Present in Political Science Departments**

<b>Curricular Models</b>	<b>Departments (%) (N=41)</b>
Very regimented (sequenced from beginning, middle, to end)	22
Somewhat regimented (some sequencing)	44
Not at all regimented	34

When Wahlke compiled *Liberal Learning and the Political Science Major: A Report to the Discipline* in 1991, it was not clear if the *Report's* many recommendations would have far reaching implications. Would departments institute more rigid course requirements and would these be sequenced in a way that built skills and knowledge in the discipline? This investigation observed the predominance of course sequencing in political science departments. Whether this constitutes change two decades in the making, or is attributable to Wahlke's recommendations, is speculation. It can be said that all departments in this study require some foundational course requirements. In addition, the majority of departments require students to take courses from various disciplinary subfields. Only half of all the departments require the senior capstone or an end of program course. While some of Wahlke's recommendations resonate in current curricular structures, not all of the Task's Force's recommendations have been incorporated.

In the *Report to the Discipline*, Wahlke stated that it was not his or the Task Force's intent to dictate a curricular structure for any department. The Task Force focused on a few recommended courses (courses that are also the focus of this study).



By the end, the *Wahlke Report* departed from recommendations for course sequencing and moved into the idea that sequencing should focus on skills rather than subject area knowledge. This recommendation identified certain skills and knowledge that political science students should acquire through their major coursework.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the *Report* did not prescribe measures or ways to assess the acquisition of such skills by political science students. The *Report* did not explain the relationship between course sequencing and skills, or what skills students should acquire as a result of specific course sequencing. Similarly, the investigation of the departments in this study does not purport to provide definitive assessment results regarding the acquisition of skills. It does, however, present a clearer picture of the relationship between course sequencing and skill acquisition. While some sequencing is evident in the departments included in this research, the purpose of such sequencing is not automatically assumed, unless a department explicitly self-identifies skill building in conjunction with course sequencing.

One department in this study appears to consider the relationship between course sequencing and building student competency in identified skills. This department's program of study forms, available on the department website, list how the foundation courses, elective requirements, and end of program course aligned to desired student learning skills and knowledge that students are expected to acquire at each part of the course sequence. This department emphasizes how students gain specific skills in each course and how subsequent courses build on these skills. For example, the department explained that upon completing three foundation courses (e.g., American politics, introduction to politics, and a scope and methods course

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<sup>6</sup> This is a lengthy list including ethics, writing, and oral communication.

required in this department's program of study), students will have the foundational knowledge for continued development of critical thinking and research skills. The program of study from this department also notes that the required senior capstone course provides a forum for students to apply the skills they developed over the entire curriculum. The program of study from this department clearly indicates how courses in the concentration areas (subfields) chosen by the student are intended to nurture depth of knowledge and understanding in specific areas. The department explains to students that breadth of knowledge comes from taking courses across the discipline in a sequenced manner.

Most departments do not indicate how a program of study relates to skill development. Some departments, however, do include this dimension in their program goals and student learning objectives. For others, the process of developing skills is apparent in the actual course structure, goals, and objectives. Most departments require the presence of student learning and program level outcomes.

### **Disciplinary Goals, Curricular Structures and Course Requirements**

In addition to making recommendations for course sequencing, the Wahlke *Report* discussed the importance of solidifying the disciplinary goals and using these goals to direct course sequencing and skill building among political science majors. While Wahlke did not identify disciplinary goals he recommended the need to identify, solidify, and use disciplinary goals to direct learning in the discipline. Wahlke's idea was that students would follow a curricular path paved by sequenced courses, and build skills and knowledge that align with these disciplinary goals. To be

successful, course content and student learning outcomes would also need to align to disciplinary goals.

Knowledge of politics and political processes constitute Goals One and Two of the discipline. These goals are presented in the required introductory courses like the introduction to American government and politics. The third goal, critical thinking, and the fourth goal, civic education, may also interconnect to the foundational requirements such as the introductory subfield courses.

Wahlke argued that students learn more about politics and become better critical thinkers (Goal Three) when they complete sequence coursework that build layers of knowledge (Goals One and Two) and certain skills.<sup>7</sup> The *Wahlke Report* emphasized how course sequencing played a part in civic education (Goal Four). The introduction to American government and politics course is part of this context and is an essential building block of the foundation upon which this knowledge, critical thinking, and civic education is built. This is similar to Story's early twentieth century recommendations and more recently to the work of Galston (2001) who presented the notion that increased political knowledge and critical thinking is central to civic education. It is apparent that these foundational pieces relate to Goals One and Two are also important for establishing the first steps of critical thinking (knowledge and comprehension), and contribute to the disciplinary goal of civic education.

As previously mentioned, state mandates for introductory coursework in higher education also illustrate the relationship between course sequencing and pursuit of disciplinary goals. One should not overlook the overt push for civic

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<sup>7</sup> Wahlke did not use the term "critical thinking" and instead used the concept of "critical analysis" which Scrivon, Paul and others considered one step in critical thinking. See Scrivon and Paul, 2004.

education in state statutes like those of California that mandate a course in California and U.S. Government for all the state's college graduates.<sup>8</sup> State laws such as this contribute to the over-arching presence of the introductory American government and politics course in political science (71 percent of the departments in this study). These laws and regulations require the availability of a foundational course in general education curriculum that addresses three of the disciplinary goals: knowledge of politics, knowledge of political processes, and civic education.

Despite the importance of using course sequencing to address, reflect, and promote the goals of the discipline, the relationship between courses and goals requires examination. Without looking at specific course content, whether these goals are being addressed is not entirely known. Only a more in depth review of course syllabi reveals whether the disciplinary goals are covered in curriculum.

## **Part II: Course Student Learning Outcomes and Alignment to Disciplinary Goals**

Testing Hypothesis One (the goals of the discipline are identifiable within the curriculum of U.S. political science departments) requires the in depth examination of course syllabi. A case study approved by one institution was selected for this detailed examination of curricular alignment with disciplinary goals. This researcher reviewed 22 course syllabi from a political science department at one representative institution covering a three year period (2006-2009). The syllabi pertained to courses comprising the core curriculum of the political science B.A. program. These were courses most

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<sup>8</sup> This requirement is further reiterated in the Regulations of the Academic Senate of the University of California. These regulations state that for graduating students: "A knowledge of American history and of the principles of American institutions under the federal and state constitutions is required of all candidates for the degree of A.B., B.Arch., and B.S." (Part II, Chapter 2, Article 1, section 638).

undergraduate political science students in the department take during their program of study in this political science program. Syllabi from the following courses were included in this analysis:<sup>9</sup>

- American Government and Politics
- World Politics
- Introduction to Politics
- Tribal Governments
- Public Administration
- Social Research Methods
- Junior Writing Course
- Senior Capstone

These syllabi were reviewed for the inclusion or reference to the four disciplinary goals. Three of the goals appeared in almost every course syllabi as clearly defined student learning outcomes (see Table 5.3). Only one course clearly listed the fourth goal, civic education or “citizenship,” as a student learning outcome in the course.

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<sup>9</sup>Syllabi reviewed included those from several sections of the same course or one syllabus per course.

**Table 5.3: Course Syllabi and Inclusion of Identified Disciplinary Goals**

Course Syllabus Reviewed	Identified Disciplinary Goals (%) (N=22)			
	Attain knowledge about political systems (national and international)	Gain an understanding of how politics works	Develop critical thinking skills	Learn to be <i>good</i> citizens (or the idea of “education for citizenship”).
American Politics	X	X		
American Politics	X	X	X	
American Politics	X	X	X	
American Politics	X	X	X	
American Politics	X	X	X	X
World Politics		X	X	
World Politics	X	X	X	
World Politics	X	X	X	
World Politics	X	X	X	
World Politics	X	X	X	
World Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Introduction to Politics	X	X	X	
Tribal Government	X			
Public Administration		X		
Research Methods			X	
Junior Writing			X	
Junior Writing		X	X	
<b>Totals</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>5</b>

Table 5.3 illustrates appearance of the first three disciplinary goals throughout courses and class sections in a representative program of study. Goal One is manifest in 77 percent of the course sections, Goal Two in 86 percent of the course sections, Goal Three in 82 percent of the course sections, and Goal Four in 5 percent of the course sections. From this table, one can assume that students who complete core

courses in a political science degree program emerge from the program with knowledge and learning experience that primarily address these three disciplinary goals and the fourth disciplinary goal is largely absent from the curricular descriptions given in the syllabi.

This review of syllabi reflects the 2008 work of Ishiyama and Breuning who examined a sample of department goals and objectives. In their study, “Assessing Assessment: Examining the Assessment Plans at 50 Political Science Departments,” the authors looked at how 50 political science departments across the country conducted student learning assessment. These authors looked through the assessment plans and reports filed by these departments, and included student learning goals. The authors found that most assessment plans reflect student learning about politics. This focus aligns with the first two learning objectives of Political Science identified in this research: (1) attaining knowledge about political systems (national and international); and, (2) gaining an understanding of how politics works. Critical thinking is also a learning objective identified in the work conducted by Ishiyama and Breuning, illustrating an alignment between what departments are doing and the discipline’s third goal: (3) developing critical thinking skills. Interestingly, most political science departments examined by Ishiyama and Breuning did not identify citizenship as one of the top learning outcomes (Goal Four, civic education, in the identified disciplinary outcomes) (2008). Table 5.4, reprinted from Ishiyama and Breuning’s work, presents their findings from the analysis of 50 department assessment plans. These findings are similar to those presented in the current research project.

**Table 5.4: Most Frequently Mentioned Learning Outcomes (reprinted from Ishiyama and Breuning 2008)**

Learning Outcome	N	%
Knowledge of Theories	34	68
Knowledge of political institutions and processes	33	66
Knowledge of Fields in Political Science	31	62
Critical thinking	31	62
Methods/Research Skills	30	60
Written Communication Skills	30	60
Oral Communication Skills	26	52
Citizenship	12	24
Career Goals	11	22
Diversity	8	16
Ethics/Values	4	8

Findings from Ishiyama and Breuning’s content analysis of sample syllabi demonstrate the relative absence of “citizenship” as a student learning outcome. This finding resonates with Bruening’s (2001) and Putnam’s (2000) earlier conclusions that civic education, or citizenship as a goal in the contemporary political science curriculum has declined since earlier decades.

It is also apparent that student learning assessment mechanisms in the sample course syllabi examined here would not be adequate for measuring or assessing civic education or learning of citizenship since it is not a listed goal. Student learning assessments most present in the course syllabi were, in the order of frequency,



multiple choice quizzes, essay exams, and short papers or term/research papers.<sup>10</sup>

There is no way of knowing the adequacy of these assessment techniques for measuring student learning the realm of citizenship. What is clear from these observations is the absence of service learning projects or community involvement assignments used to teach and assess civic education.

Why is civic education or citizenship absent from political science course syllabi examined in this research, and why is civic education (or citizenship) a goal infrequently identified as an outcome in Ishiyama and Breuning's 2008 research? Despite a body of literature and research on service learning projects evident in a series of articles from the American Political Science publication, *PS: Political Science and Politics* in 2000 and the work by service learning pioneers (see Cone and Harris 1996; and the National Service Learning Clearinghouse), service learning projects and civic education have not made their way into political science curriculum.<sup>11</sup> In this issue of *PS*, Battistoni explained how service learning projects embody civic service and democracy. Battistoni concluded that the use of service learning projects in political science curriculum seemed natural (2001, 615). According to another contributor: "If we care about the democratic civic outcomes of our teaching, we must intentionally rearrange our practices –including those integrating service learning – with those outcomes fully in mind" (Walker 2000, 615). Despite this discourse on the usefulness of civic education and its fit with political

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<sup>10</sup> Not all the syllabi examined for this analysis included clear assessments of student learning. The observation of these assessments is not precise given this absence in the sample syllabi.

<sup>11</sup> The series of article in the September 2000, *PS: Political Science and Politics* edition are from contributors who examine the role of service learning activities in political science classes. These contributors are educators in the discipline.

science's disciplinary goals, it continues to remain largely absent from the curriculum.

This analysis found the presence of three of four disciplinary goals at the course level. One disciplinary goal, civic education or citizenship, was largely absent from political science curriculum. Reviewing course syllabi for the presence of the four disciplinary goals is one piece of this analysis. Course level student learning outcomes often include acquisition of skills or competencies rather than broad goals. Goals are often defined by programs or departments rather than courses. Listing goals, then student learning outcomes as they relate to these goals would allow this researcher to accurately depict alignment to the disciplinary goals of political science. While the course level may be a more accurate barometer of what specific skills students are learning it is important to examine outcomes along with curricular structures when investigating disciplinary alignment.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined this research's first hypothesis: The goals of the discipline are identifiable in the curriculum offered by a sample of U.S. political science departments. Political science student learning occurs at the course level where students become familiar with politics and processes. Comparing curricular structures to an analysis of student learning necessitates determining which courses are required most often for political science majors. This closer look moves the research through the corridors of political science departments, programs, and courses. This pathway leads to the conclusion that the goals of the discipline are in fact identifiable in the political science curriculum, albeit at varying degrees and

frequencies. This research reviewed almost a century of recommendations to the discipline and shows how contemporary curricular structures reflect these recommendations. The discipline of political science has evolved through these recommendations. The discipline's self-reflection, evident in the integration of a these recommendations, leads to further growth and evolution.

Introductory courses have a defining position in curricular structures and most departments require that majors progress through the curriculum in a structured or defined directions. This direction is evident in the presence of similar introductory courses in the major's foundations (e.g., introduction to American government and politics, political methods or analysis), and in the end of program or senior capstone course requirement. Course sequencing brings the disciplinary goals together by establishing steps, stages, or levels for students to progress through to build their skill competency in these goal areas. Disciplinary goals are also evident in the course structures. Content analysis of a sample of syllabi demonstrates an alignment to these disciplinary goals, with the exception of civic education; a goal that appears in the recommendations but does not often appear in political science courses. These research findings replicate the findings of other contemporary studies.

This discussion thus far has focused on curricular alignment with the goals of the discipline. But what about the alignment of student learning and experience to these disciplinary goals? Chapter Six addresses this question in more detail.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **ANALYSIS TWO: STUDENT LEARNING**

#### **ALIGNMENT WITH DISCIPLINARY GOALS**

##### **Introduction**

The analysis presented in Chapter Five depicts a positive relationship between curricular structures and disciplinary goals within political science departments. This analysis reveals strong alignment between the goals of the discipline and how political science departments structure curricular pathways for their majors. But this examination does not reveal anything about student learning, and how student learning in the classroom aligns with the goals of the discipline. Specifically, this chapter addresses the second hypothesis of this research: A positive relationship exists between disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning. This chapter analyzes student learning with respect to the four disciplinary goals of political science: (1) students will attain knowledge about political systems (national and international); (2) gain an understanding of how politics works; (3) develop critical thinking skills; and, (4) learn citizenship through civic education. The analysis presented in this chapter comes from student survey data collected by the author in spring 2009. This chapter explains and presents the research that was conducted to address the second hypothesis of this research project.

Determining what students have learned throughout a political science curriculum is not a simple task. This is especially the case when attempting to draw generalizations or conclusions about student learning across institutions or

departments. However, the three models of curricular structures documented in the previous chapter allows for generalizations to be made about student learning. This chapter explains this study's findings regarding the extent to which student learning in the discipline of political science realizes intended goals of the discipline. This chapter also draws conclusions about student learning in political science departments across institutions.

Assessing student learning in courses is something that teachers contend with every semester when creating student learning outcomes and developing assessment mechanisms to measure these outcomes. End of class grades may be used to demonstrate student achievement, or student success, in a course. Direct student learning assessments (or embedded assessments) in political science may reveal student learning in specific content areas or within identified learning outcomes. For example, a course outcome may be that a student comprehends specific terms or concepts. Comprehension may be assessed by using multiple choice quizzes. If a student learning outcome is that students will improve research paper writing skills, this outcome may be assessed by requiring multiple paper drafts to be submitted. Developing assessment mechanisms at the course level is challenging. There is no doubt that developing assessments of student learning at the program or disciplinary level is equally challenging. Demonstrating the alignment between the outcomes at the course level and program, institutional, and disciplinary goals is a daunting task.

These assessment challenges are increasingly discussed in literature emerging from conversations about accreditation, student learning outcomes and assessment of outcomes in meaningful and often mandatory ways within higher education (see

Chapter Three). The discipline of political science and the departments across the country charged with teaching the field are hardly immune to such discussions. The analysis of student learning presented in this chapter represents a part of this assessment conversation.

### **Design: Quasi-Experimental**

This research assesses student learning at the disciplinary level. This chapter contributes to the discussion of student learning in political science by presenting an analysis of whether and to what extent political science instruction is meeting the goals of the discipline. The research was developed to test the second hypothesis informing this study: There is a positive relationship between student learning and the four identified disciplinary goals. A quasi-experimental design was used in this research to gather evidence of student learning alignment to disciplinary goals.<sup>1</sup>

### **Survey on Student Learning**

#### *Question Design and Disciplinary Goals*

To test hypothesis two, a survey was conducted of students taking political science courses at a sample of educational institutions. Survey questions were created to reflect identified goals of the discipline and were informed by the review of the literature on student learning. This survey asks students questions testing their political knowledge (Goal One), understanding of political processes (Goal Two), critical thinking (Goal Three), and civic education (Goal Four) (see Chapter Four for

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<sup>1</sup> A quasi-experimental design is a research design lacking a “random assignment of subjects to an experimental and control group” (Babbie 2007, 357). Babbie explained that this design still allows research to evaluate programs, in this case student learning, without all the elements of scientific experimentation (357).

an in depth discussion of the research methodology).<sup>2</sup> The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory (CCTDI) (Facione and Facione 1992), two leading surveys in the field, were consulted in the creation of the survey questions about student knowledge and critical thinking skills. The work of Dalton (2006) was consulted in the creation of questions regarding citizenship.

The NSSE provided examples from which questions in this survey were modeled. The NSSE asks students to reflect on how their educational experience helped them build personal skills. This self-reflection approach was replicated to examine the prevalence of critical thinking (Goal Three) and civic education or citizenship skills (Goal Four) in a student's experience with political science coursework.<sup>3</sup> Self-reflection questions such as these are also discussed in the work of the 1990 Delphi group, a consortium of critical thinking experts who created the CCTDI. The CCTDI has 75 "agree" or "disagree" statements asking respondents to reflect, reason, and make a judgment about their experience in the steps of critical thinking: understanding, synthesis and analysis.<sup>4</sup> Self-reflection, while not necessarily a direct assessment of a skill, provides a useful window into the student experience with the political science curriculum.

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<sup>2</sup> The target population was students enrolled in political science classes.

<sup>3</sup> Giving students a problem or issue and asking them to answer a series of questions about that problem or issue is what is done in the CLA testing. Answers are then evaluated by a panel based on critical thinking criteria.

<sup>4</sup> Similar to Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) tests that institutions can buy and participate in sponsored longitudinal studies of the development of critical thinking skills among students, the CCTDI is only available to researchers and institutions at a substantial cost so the entire assessment is not available. Using such tools would be very useful for measuring critical thinking in this context, but the cost is prohibitive for this research.

Overall, the questions in this survey provide a valuable snapshot of student learning in political science. Questions cover a range of concept areas and curricular experiences that address the four disciplinary goals informing this research. The survey questions are listed below, grouped by their associated disciplinary goal. The entire survey can be found in Appendix C.

#### Goal 1: Knowledge of political systems

1. A “representative democracy” is a form of government in which \_\_\_\_\_.
2. What is federalism?
3. What are the three branches of government?
4. Which of the following countries have a communist form of government?
5. Who is the author of this well know phrase: “And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short?”
6. The major powers at odds with each other in the “Cold War” were the United States and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. What kind of government is a *junta*?

#### Goal 2: Understanding how politics works

1. In the area of US foreign policy, Congress shares power with \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Using a scale from 1-10 where a 1 means you have absolutely no understanding of the process and a 10 means you have thorough understanding of the process, please rate your understanding of the presidential primary process.



3. The power of judicial review was established in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. “Balance of power” refers to \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The international legal concept of sovereignty allows countries to \_\_\_\_\_.

### Goal 3: Critical thinking skills

Please rate how often in your political science coursework you have done or participated in the following:

1. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.);
2. Analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory;
3. Made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods;
4. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue.

### Goal 4: Education for Citizenship

Please rate how often you...

1. engage in community service or volunteer work;
2. vote in local, state, or national elections;
3. participate in rallies, demonstrations or protests.
4. Have you ever participated in a community based project (e.g. service learning) in one of your classes?

One assumption about the survey findings is that student responses to the survey questions reflect experiences or learning in political science coursework.

Measuring learning and assessing learning outcomes in any course or program is

challenging since it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where students acquire specific skills (e.g., did they learn skills in courses outside the discipline, extracurricular experiences, or from their family). Nevertheless, this challenge does not negate the fact that active learning is taking place in political science classrooms. The snapshot of learning assessed in the survey and the relationship between learning and disciplinary goals of political science is examined throughout the remainder of this chapter.

### **Analysis**

An analysis of alignment between student learning and disciplinary goals begins with the grouping of survey data by disciplinary goals. The analysis then proceeds with two points. First overall disciplinary goals are presented. Then findings are crosstabulated with student demographics. For this analysis, respondents were categorized along two dimensions. Respondents are either political science majors or non-political science majors, and first year political science majors or senior political science majors.

Tables in this chapter depict the mean ( $M$ ) of responses to specific questions. Means are then compared across survey respondent categories in the analysis. Calculating the means required creating a composite measure of the responses within each goal area using an index scoring. Survey response data is in nominal or ordinal format, meaning some questions had either a correct or incorrect answer (nominal), and other questions were ordinal in nature where respondent answer expressed a relative magnitude of response (e.g., more than, less than). One survey question was designed using an interval scale from 1-10. For questions with nominal and ordinal

level formats responses were assigned numbers in order to calculate and compare the frequency of and dispersion of responses. Most questions allowed for four options with responses ranging from “very often”/“very good” (coded as 4), “often”/“good” (coded as 3), “sometimes”/“average” (coded as 2), to “never”/“poor” (coded as 1). For questions with correct or incorrect answers, correct responses were assigned a score of 1 and incorrect responses were scored 2. Each score was weighted equally since each response reflects a different aspect of the overall category and allows for “useful range of variation”<sup>5</sup> (Babbie 2007, 162). Respondent groups were coded or indexed by their major (political science = 1, non-political science = 2), and year (first year = 1, senior year = 4). Scoring the different respondent groups this way allowed for item analysis, or “the extent to which the index [the assigned group scores/scored] is related to (or predicts responses to) the individual items [the assigned response scores]” (Babbie 2007, 165). Calculating this relationship involved finding group means and testing the significance of difference between the mean responses of each group.

The mean ( $M$ ) was calculated by summing the frequency of responses and dividing this figure by the number of total observations or responses. Results for each question include the mean ( $M$ ) of responses, and a composite index or measurement of each overall goal. For example, the composite index for Goal One includes seven questions (Tables 6.1 and 6.2). The mean proportion of correct answers for each question is first reported and then compared across respondent groups. Comparisons across respondent categories were conducted by comparing means using a  $t$ -test

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<sup>5</sup> Babbie (2007) also noted that the usefulness of this scoring variation is that it creates “four index categories – and also provid[ed] enough cases for analysis in each category” (162).

statistic. In one question, a chi-square analysis is conducted to test the significance of response rates between response groups

The *t*-test accounts for unequal variance, meaning that group sizes do not have to be vary in equal ways.<sup>6</sup> For this research, comparisons were made between responses from two respondent groups. Along with the measuring the dispersion of these responses (*t*-test) the *p*-value was also calculated to find if differences in the dispersion of responses are significant. If the *p*-value is greater than .05 then there are “no significant differences” between population responses and the null hypothesis is accepted. If the *p*-test is less than or equal to .05, “significant differences” between groups is noted and the null hypothesis is rejected. A chi-square statistic is generated for one question involving a “yes”/ “no” format. The chi-square statistic assumes all members of the sample had the same probability of answering “yes” or “no.” A Pearson chi-square statistic is calculated to test for significant variation between group responses. These analyses are presented in the remainder of the chapter.

**Disciplinary Goal One: Political science students will attain knowledge about national and international political systems.**

The second hypothesis is examined by looking at presence of disciplinary goals in student learning.

Hypothesis Two: Disciplinary goals are positively aligned to what political science students are learning in the classroom.

Analysis this hypothesis requires testing null hypotheses for each disciplinary goal area. For disciplinary Goal One, the following null hypotheses are tested:

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<sup>6</sup> For *p*-tests, a *p*-value = >.01 could also be used and would reveal a higher degree of difference or significance. For this research, the *p* >.05, another common *p* value measure, was used.

- There is no difference between the political knowledge conveyed by political science majors and the political knowledge conveyed by non-political science majors.
- There is no difference between the political knowledge conveyed by first year political science majors and the political knowledge conveyed by senior political science majors.

Knowledge of national and international political systems may be considered the base or foundation of learning in political science. This foundation is established in the traditional approach of the discipline. This knowledge includes information about political concepts in the U.S. system of government such as representative democracy, federalism, the branches of government, and concepts related to politics at the international level such as the balance of power, communist and other forms of government. This first goal of political science also relates to or establishes the foundation of other disciplinary goals. For instance, Bloom's taxonomy of higher order thinking begins with knowledge, comprehension, and understanding. These become foundational stages that exist prior to critical thinking. For political scientists, foundational knowledge is established when students attain an understanding of national and international political systems and how they operate.

To test student learning alignment to Goal One, students were asked questions that gauged their understanding of concepts related to national and international politics (see Appendix C). Students were asked to define the following concepts: representative democracy, federalism, the branches of government, countries with communist forms of government, a quote by Thomas Hobbes, Cold War rivalries, and

a junta. Answers to these questions are utilized here as indicators of knowledge reflecting disciplinary Goal One.

The indicators in Table 6.1 represent the proportion of correct responses to the seven questions by political science majors ( $n=171$ ) and non-political science majors ( $n=54$ ).<sup>7</sup> The total mean of correct responses for each respondent group is listed in the second and third columns of the table. Means were calculated separately for political science majors and non-political science majors. The proportions of correct responses by question were averaged to find the overall mean of responses for Goal One. The higher the mean ( $M$ ) the greater the political knowledge of the group, and hence closer alignment to the disciplinary goal.

$T$ -test results are depicted in the fourth column in Table 6.1. If the  $p$ -value, or probability value associated with these  $t$ -tests is less or equal to .05, the test results are followed by an asterisk (\*). A calculation of less than .05, indicates that the difference between responses of the political science majors and non-political science majors is significant. In other words, a  $p$ -value below .05 indicates that the null hypothesis can be rejected and a positive relationship between student learning and disciplinary goals is confirmed.

The null hypothesis for this comparison is that there is no difference between the political knowledge of political science majors and the political knowledge of non-political science majors. If the mean of correct responses is significantly higher for political science majors, then the null hypothesis must be rejected. The results of the  $t$ -test and resulting  $p$ -value calculation are presented in Table 6.2.

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<sup>7</sup> The category “non-political science majors” includes respondents who did not indicate majors other than political science.

**Table 6.1: Correct Responses to Goal One Questions by Major**

	Proportion of Correct Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
Representative democracy	.96	.87	2.3*
Federalism	.67	.57	1.3*
Branches of government	.99	.10	0.8
Countries with communist forms of government	.94	.78	3.62*
Thomas Hobbes	.58	.50	1.09
Cold War rivals	.98	.94	1.19
Definition of “junta”	.60	.43	2.99*
<b>Mean</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>.73</b>	<b>3.5*</b>

\**p* < .05

The significant statistical difference between group responses to each question is notable. The first question tested knowledge about representative democracy. This question was answered correctly by the majority of both groups. The next question asked students to identify the U.S. branches of government. This question was also answered correctly by the majority in both groups, though the proportion of correct answers is lower than the first question. Despite the apparent ease of these questions, the second question resulted in a surprisingly lower proportion of correct responses among the groups than other questions. Responses to the question about the branches of government were overwhelmingly correct. There was no significant difference in

the responses to the question about Thomas Hobbes, though this was the lowest reported rate of correct responses. The question about Cold War rivalries received the most correct responses. The table shows that the most significant differences between political science and non-political science majors were in questions testing international politics. Political science majors correctly identified communist countries and correctly defined a junta more frequently than non-political science majors.

When the proportion of correct responses for each question is totaled, political science majors answered Goal One questions correctly more often than non-political science majors. This difference is significant in the questions about a representative democracy, federalism, countries with communist forms of government, and the junta concept. There is no significant difference in the responses to the questions about the balance of power, Thomas Hobbes, and Cold War rivalries. The total of correct responses to all questions for political science majors was  $M=.82$ . The mean of correct responses for non-political science majors is  $M=.73$ . The overall  $t$ -test value is 3.5 with a  $p$ -value of  $<.05$ . The difference between these two groups is significant with political science majors reporting correct answers significantly more often than non-majors. Thus we see that the null hypothesis is rejected. Political science majors overall have more knowledge of the U.S. political system, and the political science curricula reflects values embodied in Goal One of the discipline.

Continuing this test of student learning alignment to the first disciplinary goal involved comparing the proportion of correct responses for first year political science students and senior year political science students (Table 6.2). If the curriculum in



political science is aligned with disciplinary Goal One, we would expect to see a higher proportion of correct responses for seniors rather than first year students.

The null hypothesis for this comparison is that there is no difference between the political knowledge of first year political science majors and the political knowledge of senior political science majors. If the mean of correct responses is significantly higher for senior political science majors, then the null hypothesis must be rejected. The results of the *t*-test and resulting *p*-value calculation are presented in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2: Mean of Correct Responses Disciplinary Goal One Questions by Time in Major**

	Proportion of Correct Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	First Year Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =86)	
Representative democracy	.83	.98	2.40*
Federalism	.67	.70	.22
Branches of government	1.0	1.0	NA
Countries with communist forms of government	.83	.97	1.96*
Thomas Hobbes	.58	.63	.30
Cold War rivals	1.0	1.0	NA
Definition of "junta"	.42	.71	2.05*
<b>Mean</b>	<b>.76</b>	<b>.85</b>	<b>2.03*</b>

\**p* < .05

Table 6.2 demonstrates that knowledge of political systems and political science concepts is significantly greater among senior political science majors than first year majors. Differences in group responses to questions about representative democracy and international politics are the most significant. More senior political science major responded correctly to the question about representative democracy, and the question about countries with a communist form of government. Senior political science majors also correctly defined a junta more frequently than first year political science majors. Table 6.2 shows the significance of these differences with senior political science majors getting these answers correct more frequently than first

year majors. The table also shows questions where there was no statistical significance between these groups. All first year and senior political science majors answered the branches of government and Cold War questions correctly. There was a slight margin between first year and senior political science majors' correctly identifying federalism, and no discernable difference in correct response rates to the question about Thomas Hobbes.

In Table 6.2 the total mean of correct responses to all disciplinary Goal One questions by first year political science majors was  $M=.76$ . The total mean of correct responses for senior political science majors is  $M=.85$ . Thus seniors answer these questions correctly more often than first year students. A *t*-test calculation revealed significant differences between responses by these two groups ( $t(2.03)$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus there is a significant difference in overall knowledge of politics between first year political science and senior political science majors, suggesting that seniors have gained political knowledge through their political science coursework. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected as senior political science students overall have greater political knowledge than first year political science students.

The data presented in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 partially support the second hypothesis of this research: A positive relationship exists between disciplinary Goal One and what political science students are actually learning in the classroom. This is evidenced in political science majors answering knowledge questions more frequently than non-political science majors, and in senior political science majors demonstrating greater political knowledge than first year political science majors. It is reasonable to conclude that disciplinary learning is occurring over time. The analysis

now turns to an examination of the relationship between alignment of disciplinary Goal Two and students learning.

**Goal Two: Political science students will gain an understanding of how politics works**

Goal Two of the political science discipline states that students will acquire an understanding of how politics works. Student learning alignment to this goal requires testing the following null hypotheses:

- There is no difference between the knowledge about political processes conveyed by political science majors and the knowledge about political processes conveyed by non-political science majors.
- There is no difference between the knowledge about political processes conveyed by first year political science majors and knowledge about political processes conveyed by first year political science majors.
- There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process of political science majors and the understanding of this process by non-political science majors.
- There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process of first year political science majors and the understanding of this process by senior political science majors.

The extent to which learning in the political science classroom reflects this goal is examined in Tables 6.3 through 6.6. The intent of Goal Two was operationalized by asking respondents to answer a series of questions about their understanding of political processes, capturing an understanding of how politics

work. Survey questions addressing this goal focused on processes found in both domestic and international politics and political systems (see Appendix C for full questionnaire). For example, students were asked about the role of the U.S. Congress in making foreign policy; the meaning of judicial review; the implications of balance of power in the international system; and how sovereignty matters in international relations. Students were also asked to rate their understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process on a scale of 1-10, with 10 indicating a high level of understanding. Results from this question are presented separately as the data exists at the interval level rather than an ordinal level like the other knowledge questions.

The mean of correct responses to questions about how politics works are combined to create a composite index or measurement of overall goal attainment. Data for political science and non-political science majors is shown in Table 6.3. Table 6.4 depicts responses for first year and senior political science majors. Interval level data for the question about understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process is presented in Tables 6.5 through 6.8.

**Table 6.3: Mean of Correct Responses to Disciplinary Goal Two Questions by Major**

	Proportion of Correct Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
Foreign policy power of Congress	.89	.78	2.22*
Judicial review	.61	.57	.52
Balance of power	.51	.52	.05
Sovereignty in international relations	.89	.74	2.86*
<b>Mean</b>	<b>.73</b>	<b>.65</b>	<b>2.00*</b>

\**p* < .05

The difference in correct responses between political science and non-political science majors is most significant for questions about the foreign policy powers of Congress and the meaning of the concept of sovereignty in international politics. Political science majors answered these questions correctly significantly more often than non-political science majors. Political science majors accurately identified the relationship between Congress and the President significantly more often than non-political science majors. Political science majors also recognized the meaning of sovereignty in the international arena more frequently than non-political science majors. No significant difference exists between the correct responses of political science and non-political science majors for two questions. Although more political science majors answered the question about judicial review correctly than non-political science majors, the difference between responses was not significant. Non-

political science majors correctly answered the question about the balance of power in the international system slightly more often than political science majors, but again, this difference is not significant.

Results from these questions indicate that political science majors have better overall knowledge of political processes and systems than non-political science majors. Difference between the proportion of correct responses of political science and non-political science majors is significant with political science majors responding correctly more often than non-political science majors. The total mean for correct responses to these questions for political science majors is  $M=.73$ . The mean of correct responses for non-political science majors is  $M=.65$ . A significant difference between these two groups is determined to exist ( $t(2.00)$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This calculation represents a difference in overall knowledge of political processes between political science and non-political science majors. Thus the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the knowledge about political processes conveyed by political science majors and the knowledge about political processes conveyed by non-political science majors can be rejected.

Continuing this test of learning alignment to disciplinary Goal Two involves comparing the response for questions about how politics works by first year and senior year political science majors (Table 6.4). If the political science curriculum is aligned with disciplinary Goal Two, knowledge about political processes will be attained with senior political science majors answering questions about these processes more correctly than first year political science majors.

This analysis is centered around testing the null hypothesis: There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between by first year political science majors and senior political science majors. The results of the *t*-test calculations are presented in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4: Mean of Correct Responses to Disciplinary Goal Two Questions by Time in Major**

	Proportion of Correct Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	First Year Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =86)	
Foreign policy power of Congress	.83	.93	1.14
Judicial review	.58	.64	.38
Balance of power	.58	.57	.09
Sovereignty in international relations	.92	.93	.17
<b>Mean</b>	<b>.73</b>	<b>.77</b>	<b>.61</b>

\**p* < .05

Table 6.4 shows that both groups of respondents provided correct answers more often than not to the question about Congress's role in foreign policy making. Both groups also more often correctly defined the concept of sovereignty. Correct responses to the question about judicial review and the balance of power were less frequent among respondents from both groups.

Table 6.4 demonstrates no significant difference between acquisition of disciplinary Goal Two knowledge by time in major. There is virtually no distinction



in the knowledge of political processes and systems between first year and senior political science majors. The total mean for correct responses to these questions for first year political science majors is  $M=.73$ . The mean of correct responses for senior political science majors is  $M=.77$ . No significant differences occur in the responses offered by first year political science majors and majors in their senior year ( $t(.61)$ ,  $p >.05$ ). Given these results, the null hypothesis is accepted. It may be deduced that there is no significant increase in knowledge of political processes for senior respondents who have presumably taken more political science coursework than first-year students.

An additional question was posed in the survey to further ascertain respondent understanding of political processes. This question asked participants to reflect on the U.S. presidential primary process by self-identifying their level of understanding on a scale of 1-10 (9-10 = “very good,” 8 = “good,” 6-7 = “average,” 5 and below = “poor”). The null hypotheses in this test is that there is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between political science majors and non-political science majors, and there is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between first year political science majors and senior political science majors. Mean responses for this question were calculated and means compared between political science and non-political science majors, and first year and senior political science majors. Table 6.5 depicts data for political science and non-political science respondents.

**Table 6.5: Perception of Understanding the U.S. Presidential Primary System by Major (scale 1-10)**

	Proportion of Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
Understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process	8.19 (1.47)	6.85 (2.23)	5.10*

*Note: \*p < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.*

Political science majors have a greater understanding of the primary process ( $M= 8.19$ ) than non-political science majors ( $M=6.85$ ). The comparison of mean responses to the question pertaining to the understanding of the primary process is significant. According to this data application of the *t*-test reveals that the difference in understanding between political science and non-political science majors is significant ( $t(5.10), p<.05$ ). This calculation shows that political science majors as a group are significantly more familiar with this process.

In addition, the standard deviation shows that the responses of political science majors are within 1.47 points of the group mean response. The standard deviation shows responses of the political science majors were clustered closer to the mean and responses from non-political science majors were spread further from the mean. For non-political science majors, responses were within 2.23 points of the mean. Thus these data findings reject the null hypothesis as political science majors report having a better understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process with significantly greater frequency than non-political science majors. We can say that

disciplinary Goal Two is positively aligned with curricula regarding knowledge of how the presidential primary process works.

The question referring to understanding of the presidential primary process was also tested for first year and senior political science majors. The null hypothesis for this test states that there is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between first year and senior political science majors. Results of this test are presented in Table 6.6.

**Table 6.6: Perception of Understanding the U.S. Presidential Primary System by Time in Major (scale 1-10)**

	Proportion of Responses		<i>t</i> -test
	First Year Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =86)	
Understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process	8.17 (1.53)	8.44 (1.28)	.68

*Note: \*p < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.*

Table 6.6 demonstrates that first year political science majors self-report overall familiarity with the presidential primary at a mean of 8.17. Senior political science majors in comparison report understanding at a mean of 8.44. Application of the *t*-test reveals no significant difference in understanding between first year and senior political science majors. Further, the standard deviation shows that responses within these groups are comparably clustered around the mean (within 1.53 and 1.28 points within the mean respectively) (*t*(.68), *p*>.05). The data shown in Table 6.6 leads us to accept the null hypothesis that there is no difference between first year and

senior political science majors. There is no significant difference between knowledge of the presidential primary process represented by time in the major.

In conclusion, alignment of student learning and disciplinary Goal Two was measured by questions asking students to demonstrate their knowledge of political processes. The mean response (on the scale of 1-10) was highest among political science majors who overall indicated a “good” understanding of this process ( $M=8.19$ ). Non-political science majors reported an “average” understanding of this process ( $M=6.85$ ). Responses to disciplinary Goal Two questions revealed that political science majors have greater knowledge of political processes than non-political science majors. No significant differences in knowledge exists, however, between first year and senior political science majors, leading to the conclusion that knowledge of political processes is no greater among senior political science majors.

Understanding that no significant difference in knowledge of the presidential primary process exist between first year and senior political science majors requires deeper analysis of courses taken by respondents. The primary process may be covered in detail in introductory American government and politics courses frequently required in political science curriculum. If this is the case, first year and senior political science majors most likely studied this process in their major or general education coursework. Further analysis of these results requires investigating curricular pathways of respondents.

While measuring student learning through their knowledge acquisition is complex, it is equally if not more challenging to measure critical thinking skills (disciplinary Goal Three) with a few multiple choice questions. Since critical thinking

is frequently taught through pedagogical processes, asking respondents to personally reflect on experiences with critical thinking skills is the most efficient approach. A testing of student learning alignment with disciplinary Goal Three (critical thinking) follows.

### **Goal Three: Political science students will develop critical thinking skills**

Disciplinary Goal Three centers around student acquisition of critical thinking skills. Student learning alignment to this goal requires testing the following null hypotheses:

- There is no difference between political science majors and non-political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
- There is no difference between first year and senior political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.
- Students in capstone and upper division courses have not engaged in more critical thinking activities than students in lower division courses.

According to the Delphi Group of 1990's *Consensus Statement on Critical Thinking and the Ideal Critical Thinker*, critical thinking in the educational context includes:

“...purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations upon

which that judgment is based. Critical thinking is essential as a tool of inquiry” (Facione 1990, 3).

The group’s statement continues:

“The ideal critical thinker is habitually inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, prudent in making judgments, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, reasonable in the selection of criteria, focused in inquiry, and persistent in seeking results which are as precise as the subject and the circumstances of inquiry permit. Thus, educating good critical thinkers means working toward this ideal” (Facione 1990, 3).

There are a number of ways to assess student learning and the ability to apply the skill of critical thinking. Schools may purchase tools and questionnaires for assessing critical thinking skills from organizations (see Chapter Three for a review of these instruments). These critical thinking assessment instruments are expensive, and are typically administered by private organizations that employ teams/committees to assess student responses. For example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment gives students a problem or current event issue and poses a series of questions directing the student to use critical thinking skills (i.e., do they comprehend the issue? can they analyze the issue? can they evaluate the issue?).

Assessing student writing and thinking on issues with a critical thinking rubric and a team of readers is an excellent approach to measuring critical thinking in the discipline of political science. Likewise, institutions and departments often utilize exit

exams or portfolio projects reviewed by a team of reviewers to assess critical thinking. This can be a cost prohibitive undertaking when looking at political science students from multiple institutions.<sup>8</sup>

Gathering evidence of whether critical thinking is achieved through the curriculum required a series of questions added to the student survey examining various dimensions of critical thinking skills as identified in the Delphi group's statement. Questions in this section of the survey asked respondent to reflect on critical thinking experiences such as their exposure to diverse perspectives, and engagement in analysis and evaluation in their political science coursework. Asking students to reflect on their learning experiences using the questions in this survey was useful. As Banta points out, learning and practicing a skill (such as critical thinking) is part of the overall learning experience (2004, 39). Relying on student self-reporting on learning experiences is a useful approach to identifying their experience in applying critical thinking skills. If students identify little or no experience in applying critical thinking skills, then there is a gap between student learning and the disciplinary goal of critical thinking.

This research asked students to identify their experiences in critical thinking in the political science classroom with a number of survey questions. These questions asked students how often diverse perspectives were included in their course work, and how often they had analyzed ideas and theories, made judgments about information, or examined an argument's strengths or weaknesses (see Appendix C for full text of questions). Respondents were given response options of "very often," "often," "sometimes," or "never."

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<sup>8</sup> This mechanism was not available for this research but would be worthwhile in future research.

The following tables present a summary of responses to these questions. Answers to these questions serve as indicators of political science majors' experience with and acquisition of critical thinking skills in political science coursework. The data in Table 6.7 reflect all student responses to these questions. Table 6.7 shows the variation range of responses between “very-often” to “often” and “sometimes” to “never.” According to Babbie (2007) this method facilitates a more accurate depiction of the “two ends of the range of variation” (417). Table 6.8 breaks out the data to compare responses by major. Table 6.9 breaks out the data to compare responses by time in the political science major.

**Table 6.7: Critical Thinking Experiences in Political Science Courses**

	<b>All Respondents (N=225)</b>	
<i>Please rate how often in your political science courses you have...</i>	<i>Very often- Often (%)</i>	<i>Sometimes- Never (%)</i>
...included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in your work?	80	20
...analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory?	92	8
...made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods?	84	16
...examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	71	29

Data presented in Table 6.7 shows that the vast majority of students have “very often” or “often” engaged in critical thinking activities in their political science



coursework. Experience in examining the strengths and weaknesses of topics or issues has been less frequently experienced than other dimensions of critical thinking.

Comparisons of question result are presented in Table 6.8 by major (political science and non-political science majors). This data in this table demonstrates a positive relationship between disciplinary goals and what students are learning in the classroom. The critical thinking questions asked participants to reflect on the frequency in which they engaged in critical thinking in their political science coursework. The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between what political science majors and non-political science majors experience in their coursework with respect to critical thinking experience. The null hypothesis rests on the assumption that political science majors have more coursework experience in the discipline than non-political science majors, or may perceive their experience differently than non-political science majors.

The overall mean responses for the critical thinking question were calculated and compared between political science and non-political science majors. A response mean closer to 4 represents greater frequency of engagement in critical thinking activities in political science coursework experience. A response mean closer to 1 represents less frequent engagement in critical thinking activities in political science coursework experience. Table 6.8 depicts this data by respondent group.

**Table 6.8: Mean Response to Disciplinary Goal Three Questions by Major**

	Response		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
<i>Please rate how often in your political science courses you have...</i>			
...included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in your work?	3.16 (.75)	3.09 (.81)	.55
...analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory?	3.44 (.61)	3.30 (.74)	1.41
...made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods?	3.30 (.72)	3.24 (.78)	.50
...examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	3.01 (.86)	3.04 (.94)	.19
<b>Mean</b>	3.23 (.53)	3.17 (.60)	.53

*Note:* \**p* < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.

Table 6.8 presents the mean of responses for the political science and non-political science majors based on a scale of 1-4 with 1 meaning “never” and a 4 meaning “very often.” The table demonstrates that political science majors self-report slightly more exposure to critical thinking experiences in their political science coursework, but the difference from non-political science majors is not significant. When calculated individually the average response to Goal Three items is *M*= 3.23 for political science majors and *M*=3.17 for non-political science majors. The standard deviation shows that the responses within these groups were comparably clustered around the mean (within .53 and .60 points within the mean respectively).

The data shown in Table 6.8 leads us to accept the null hypothesis that there is no difference between political science and non-political science majors' experience with critical thinking activities in their political science coursework ( $t(.53), p > .05$ ). Since all respondents were enrolled in political science courses, this result is not surprising. The results do show that students often experience critical thinking activities in political science coursework.

Testing student learning alignment to disciplinary Goal Three continues by comparing the experiences of first year and senior political science majors (Table 6.9). This comparison is useful for gauging if more experience in political science coursework (i.e., more courses over more semesters) amounts to more experience with critical thinking activities for the political science major. This analysis tests the hypothesis that more time in political science coursework exposes students to greater experience with critical thinking activities. This comparison involves testing the null hypothesis stating there are no differences between first year and senior political science majors exposure to critical thinking experiences in political science coursework.

Table 6.9 presents responses to Goal Three critical thinking questions in the second and third columns along with the standard deviation. The standard deviation indicates the dispersion of group responses around the mean. The  $t$ -test calculation presented in the fourth column reflects the significance of differences, if any, between first year and senior political science majors. Each row presents a specific survey question about critical thinking experience. The final row depicts the mean responses by respondent year.

**Table 6.9: Mean Response to Disciplinary Goal Three Questions by Time in Major**

	Response		t-test
	First Year Political Science Majors (n=12)	Senior Political Science Majors (n=86)	
<i>Please rate how often in your political science courses you have...</i>			
...included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in your work?	3.00 (.74)	3.15 (.78)	.64
...analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory?	3.75 (.45)	3.40 (.64)	1.86
...made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods?	3.25 (.62)	3.30 (.72)	.24
...examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	3.00 (.95)	3.07 (.85)	.26
<b>Mean</b>	3.25 (.46)	3.23 (.54)	.12

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.

Examining the response means by respondent year reveals no significant difference between first year and senior political science majors in terms of experience with critical thinking activities in their political science coursework. The average response to Goal Three items is  $M = 3.25$  for first year political science majors and  $M = 3.23$  for senior political science majors. The standard deviation shows that the response dispersion was comparable for both groups (within .46 points of the mean for first year political science majors and within .54 points of the mean for

senior political science majors). Both groups responded between 3 (“often”) and 4 (“very often”) in the frequency they experienced critical thinking activities in their political science coursework, similar to the responses of political science and non-political science majors in Table 6.8. Confirmation of the null hypothesis in this analysis is surprising ( $t(12), p>.05$ ). The assumption is that the disciplinary goal of critical thinking would be felt accumulatively by students. In other words, seniors with more coursework experience would demonstrate greater frequency in critical thinking engagement than first year political science respondents. As a disciplinary goal, critical thinking may be a frequent goal in all political science classrooms. Thus first year and senior political science majors experience the same frequency of critical thinking activities in all their political science coursework, be it one first year class or all classes.

Despite no difference in the findings of first year versus senior year students, it is interesting to take a course-centered look at student alignment with disciplinary Goal Three in addition to a year in major focus. Similar to the previous relationship test, this analysis explores whether upper division political science courses provide more critical thinking activities than lower division classes. This research assumes that students in upper division and capstone political science courses have had more experience with critical thinking activities than students in lower division political science courses. The hypothesis examined is there is a positive relationship between disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning in the classroom. The null hypothesis tested in this relationship is that students in capstone and upper division courses have not engaged in more critical thinking activities than students in

lower division courses. To test a relationship between the independent variable (three groups: capstone students, upper division students, and lower division students) and the critical thinking experiences (dependent variables), an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted.<sup>9</sup> Findings are presented in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10: Mean Response to Disciplinary Goal Three Questions by Level of Coursework in Major**

	Response			ANOVA
	Lower Division (n=55)	Upper Division (n=124)	Capstone (n=24)	
<i>Please rate how often in your political science courses you have...</i>				
...included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in your work?	3.22 (.69)	3.07 (.79)	3.17 (.76)	.48
...analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory?	3.38 (.68)	3.39 (.65)	3.38 (.65)	1.0
...made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods?	3.22 (.71)	3.31 (.73)	3.17 (.82)	.60
...examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	3.02 (.94)	2.96 (.85)	2.88 (.90)	.80
<b>Mean</b>	3.21 (.56)	3.18 (.53)	3.15 (.55)	.89

*Note: \*p < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.*

Overall, responses for all three groups cluster around “often” to “very often” in their political science coursework. The mean responses are lower for the question examining the strengths and weaknesses of views on a topic or issue. It is noteworthy also that no significant increase in the frequency of experience in critical thinking

<sup>9</sup> The ANOVA test performs the same function as the *t*-test but allows for comparison among more than two independent variables.

activities identified by students in upper division and capstone political science courses exists. ANOVA test results presented in Table 6.10 reveals no significant difference in mean response scores for students in the three types of courses ( $ANOVA(.89), p>.05$ ). The null hypothesis is thus accepted.<sup>10</sup>

Tables 6.8 through 6.10 demonstrate that no significant differences exist between various groups when it comes to critical thinking activities. It would seem that political science curriculum and student learning is not aligned with this goal of the discipline. The responses reflecting experiences or attitudes towards citizenship are examined in the analysis of the disciplinary Goal Four questions.

#### **Goal Four: Political science students will learn to be good citizens**

The presentation of data from disciplinary Goal Four states that education should provide training for citizenship, or students should learn to be “good citizens.” Analysis of student learning in this area addresses the second hypothesis being tested in this research: A positive relationship exists between disciplinary goals and what political science students are actually learning. Student learning alignment to this goal requires testing the following null hypotheses:

- There is no difference in the importance that political science and non-political science majors place on voting.
- There is no difference in the importance that first year and senior political science majors place on voting.

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<sup>10</sup> Since there was no measurable difference found in this data, the Brown-Forsythe and Welch options were not needed to calculate alternative versions of this relationship.

- There is no difference in participating in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between political science and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference in participation in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between first year and senior political science majors.
- There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between political science and non-political science majors.
- There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between first year and senior political science majors.

Measuring whether political science students emerge from their coursework having achieved Goal Four involves understanding the complexity of the concept of “citizenship.” “Citizenship” is a multi-faceted term. The literature suggests that citizenship builds on critical thinking skills and encompasses stages of understanding, analysis, and evaluation. It also includes what Dalton (2006) called citizenship as “duty,” and citizenship as “engagement.” Like critical thinking, as the Delphi group pointed out, civic education is not only a desired skill in education, but an important skill for citizens of a democracy.

“....As such, critical thinking is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one’s personal and civic life. While not synonymous with good thinking, critical thinking is a pervasive and self-rectifying human phenomenon. .... It combines developing critical thinking skills with



nurturing those dispositions which consistently yield useful insights and which are the basis of a rational and democratic society” (Facione 1990, 3). According to Facione critical thinking skills are part of the foundations of a democratic society is based on the participation or engagement of citizens.

In his paper, “Citizenship Norms and Political Participation in America: The Good News Is...the Bad News is Wrong” (2006), Dalton explained that there are shifts in the norms of citizenship from “duty” (voting, obeying laws, serving on a jury) to “engagement.” Dalton used survey data from Center for the Democracy and Civil Society (CDACS) at Georgetown University to show an increase in “engagement” and in some cases, a decline in the citizen’s sense of “duty” over time. Dalton counters the claims of Putnam (2000) and others that American political participation is experiencing a precipitous downturn. Instead, Dalton argues paralleling Inglehart’s 1990 and 2005 concept of “post materialism,” engaged citizenship is increasing. This survey asked a series of questions/statements reflecting Dalton’s explanation of “duty” and “engagement.”

Survey questions asking students to reflect on experiences that embody these levels of citizenship, or civic education, were similar in format and structure to critical thinking questions asking students to reflect on personal experiences in the classroom. The perception of the survey respondents with regards to these democratic foundations, their experience with civic education, and their perceptions of citizenship (duty and engagement) were examined through the goal four questions. In terms of citizenship as a sense of duty, survey respondents were asked to reflect on the importance of voting. Looking at citizenship as engagement, respondents were

asked to report the frequency in which they engaged in community service or volunteering activities, their frequency of engagement with other forms of political participation, and their experience with classroom service learning projects

*Civic Education and Sense of Duty: The Importance of Voting*

Tables 6.11 and 6.13 present responses to the survey questions probing duty as a component of civic education. The hypothesis examined is there is a positive relationship between the civic education disciplinary goal and what political science students are learning in the classroom. This question asked the respondents whether they felt it was important to vote in elections. Table 6.11 includes the frequency of responses to this question with response categories of “very important” and “important” collapsed (see Babbie 2007, 417).

**Table 6.11: Disciplinary Goal Four and the Importance of Voting by All Respondents**

	<b>Very Important- Important (%) (N=225)</b>	<b>Sometimes (%) (N=225)</b>	<b>Never (%) (N=225)</b>
Please rate how important you think it is to vote in national, state, and local elections.	95	3	2

Overall, as indicated in Table 6.11, nearly all respondents (95 percent) think that voting is “very important” to “important” and 2 percent say that it voting is never important.

When responses are compared between respondent groups variation emerges. Table 6.12 shows the responses of political science majors and non-majors to this question. Responses were coded for calculation purposes: “very important” (coded 4),



“important (coded 3),” “sometimes” (coded 2), and “never” (coded 1). The null hypothesis tested in this relationship is there is no difference in the importance that political science and non-political science majors place on voting. To test this relationship, mean responses for the importance of voting question were calculated and compared between political science and non-political science majors using the *t*-test and *p*-value statistics. A response mean closer to 4 represents greater importance placed on voting. A response mean closer to 1 represents less importance placed on voting. Table 6.12 depicts this data by respondent group.

**Table 6.12: Mean Response to Importance of Voting by Major**

	Response		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
Please rate how important you think it is to vote in national, state, and local elections.	3.71 (.60)	3.43 (.70)	2.96*

*Note: \*p* < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.

Table 6.12 depicts a significant difference between attitudes toward the importance of voting by political science and non-political science majors (*t*(2.96), *p*<.05). While both groups consider voting between “important” and “very important,” the difference between group responses is significant. The results of this comparison disprove the null hypothesis as political science majors place significantly greater importance on voting than non-political science majors. Thus we see alignment to the curriculum as political science students have been more exposed to civic education in the curriculum.

Supporting the second hypothesis also involves comparing responses about the importance of voting between first year and senior political science majors. The null hypothesis tested is that there is no difference in the importance that first year and senior political science majors place on voting. Comparing this relationship shows whether longer exposure to the disciplinary goal, civic education, by senior political science majors results in more significant acquisition or frequent experience of the goal. The mean responses for the importance of voting question were calculated and compared between first year and senior political science majors using the *t*-test and *p*-value statistics. A response mean closer to 4 represents greater importance placed on voting. A response mean closer to 1 represents less importance placed on voting. The relationship of this data is presented in Table 6.13.

**Table 6.13: Mean Response to Importance of Voting by Time in Major**

	Response		<i>t</i> -test
	First Year Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =86)	
Please rate how important you think it is to vote in national, state, and local elections.	3.92 (.29)	3.70 (.58)	.20

*Note: \*p < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.*

In Table 6.13 we see that both first year and senior political science majors believe it is important to vote in elections. First year students appear to have stronger beliefs in this regard; however there is no significant difference in the groups' reporting of importance (*t*(.20), *p*>.05). Thus the null hypothesis in this case is proven

to be true. It is interesting to note that the importance placed on voting is higher among first year than senior political science students.

In sum, Tables 6.11 through 6.13 demonstrate that political science majors place significantly greater importance on voting than non-political science majors. There are no differences however in responses from first year and senior political science majors. These tables show that respondents maintain a sense of citizenship through “duty” in the importance they place on voting. The importance that all students in political science coursework place on voting demonstrates an alignment to the curricular goal of civic education. We turn now to examining curricular alignment in the area of citizenship that involves “engagement.”

#### *Civic Education and Engagement*

Survey data collected in this research probes Dalton’s arguments about the continued importance of duty as a citizenship norm. Engagement is another dimension of citizenship.<sup>11</sup> The survey asked a series of questions examining student engagement in the political system. Table 6.14 presents responses to all engagement questions in the survey. Response categories are collapsed into three options: “very often”/“often,” “sometimes” and “never.” Information in Table 6.14 indicates the relative frequency for which the respondents participate in community service or volunteer work, and how often respondents participate in political demonstrations or rallies.

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<sup>11</sup> Dalton (2006) argued that forms of political participation are changing and more frequently include different ways to influence public policy making or engagement in what he calls “civil society activity” (2006, 7).

**Table 6.14: Frequency of Participation by All Respondents**

	<b>Very Often-Often (%) (N=225)</b>	<b>Sometimes (%) (N=225)</b>	<b>Never (%) (N=225)</b>
Please rate how often you engage in community service or volunteer work.	30	39	30
Please rate how often you participate in political rallies, demonstrations or protests.	32	36	33

According to Table 6.14 political participation is evenly distributed across the three response categories. Thirty percent of respondents indicate frequent involvement in community service or volunteer work, 39 percent sometimes engage in this service, while 30 percent never engage in community service or volunteer work. Comparably, 32 percent often participate in political rallies, demonstrations or protests, 36 percent sometimes participate in such events, and 33 percent never participate in these political forums. These findings do not confirm Dalton's thesis that most respondents only indicate "sometimes" or "never" engagement in volunteer work or unconventional participation. However, these numbers are somewhat reflective of Dalton's finding. Dalton compared citizen activity patterns from a variety of different sources and showed that participation in protest activity has increased since the 1970s and community action activity has increased since the 1960s (2006, 9). His findings peg the frequency of protest activity today to be between 35-40 percent, and community action to be closer to 40 percent. Data findings in this survey closely resemble Dalton's findings.

Tables 6.15 and 6.16 further examine the relationship between student learning and disciplinary Goal Four. Data in Table 6.15 compares political science

and non-political science major responses to engagement questions and Table 6.16 compares responses between first year and senior political science majors.

For purpose of calculation, responses were assigned codes: “very often” (coded 4), “often” (coded 3), “sometimes” (coded 3), and “never” (coded 1). Mean response close to 4 thus reflect greater engagement frequency in volunteer work or participation in political demonstrations. Responses closer to 1 represent less frequent engagement in these activities. Goal Four questions address the second hypothesis: Disciplinary goals (in this case, civic education) and what political science students are learning are positively reflected in the classroom. This hypothesis lends itself to the testing using a null hypothesis: There are no differences in frequency participation by major or time in major. Mean responses for the engagement questions were calculated and compared using the *t*-test and *p*-value statistics. Table 6.15 depicts this data for political science and non-political science majors. Table 6.16 depicts this data for first year and senior political science majors.

**Table 6.15: Mean Response to Civic Engagement by Major**

	Response		<i>t</i> -test
	Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =54)	
Please rate how often you engage in community service or volunteer work.	2.12 (.95)	2.02 (.94)	.71
Please rate how often you participate in political rallies, demonstrations or protests.	2.19 (1.0)	1.81 (.89)	2.45*

*Note: \*p* < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.

Table 6.15 compares the mean of political science major responses to non-political science major responses. The mean responses reflect the frequency of engagement reported by each group. The average response to the civic engagement items is  $M= 2.19$  for political science majors and  $M=1.81$  for non-political science majors. The standard deviation shows that the response dispersion was comparable for both groups (within 1.0 points of the mean for political science majors and within .89 points of the mean for non-political science majors). Both groups responded between 3 (“often”) and 1 (“never”) in the frequency they engaged in civic activities. The  $t$ -test comparison shows that political science majors participate more frequently in political rallies, demonstrations or protests more than non-political science majors, and that this difference is significant ( $t(2.45) p<.05$ ). The table shows that both political science and non-political science majors “sometimes” to “often” engage in community service or volunteer work and that there is no significant difference between these groups in the frequency of engagement. This test rejects the null hypothesis in that political science students participate unconventionally more frequently than non-political science majors and supports the second research hypothesis that political science students are learning citizenship.

Responses by first year and senior political science majors presented in Table 6.16 add further information for analyzing the null hypothesis that there is no difference in engagement between first year and senior political science majors.



**Table 6.16: Mean Response to Civic Engagement by Time in Major**

	Response		<i>t</i> -test
	First Year Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors ( <i>n</i> =86)	
Please rate how often you engage in community service or volunteer work.	2.00 (.60)	2.20 (1.04)	.64
Please rate how often you participate in political rallies, demonstrations or protests.	2.42 (.67)	2.20 (1.08)	.68

*Note: \*p < .05; Standard deviation appears in parenthesis below the means.*

The mean of responses to these questions shown in Table 6.16 are consistently within the “never” to “sometimes” range. When it comes to participating in political rallies, demonstrations or protests first year political science majors indicate a higher frequency of participation ( $M=2.42$ ) than senior political science majors ( $M=2.20$ ), though this difference is not significant. The standard deviation shows that first year political science major’s responses were within .60 points of the group’s mean response to the volunteering question, and .67 points of the group’s mean response to the participation question. The standard deviation for senior political science responses was wider for each question, at 1.04 and 1.08 respectively, indicating greater dispersion in senior responses. Both groups responded between 3 (“often”) and 2 (“sometimes”) in the frequency they engaged in volunteer work and unconventional participation. Breakdown of the data by time in major does not lead to rejection of the null hypothesis. This data does not show a significant difference between first year and senior political science students for engagement ( $t(.68)$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

It may be assumed that time in the major or greater exposure to political science curriculum contribute to teaching civic education and learning the “norms” of citizenship (duty and engagement), though this is not revealed in the data.

Though the null hypothesis is accepted, it is important to note that students are engaging in political and service activity. Most students engage in some political participation other than voting (Table 6.14). Although the frequency of this engagement among all students is not high, it is present. Tables 6.14 through 6.16 show that political science students exhibit the values of citizenship both in the importance they give to duty (voting) and in the frequency in which they engage in community service and unconventional participation (Tables 6.15 and 6.16).

Community service in the form of service learning is another dimension for citizenship through civic education. The survey asked students if their political science coursework has included a service learning activity in the curriculum. This question adds another element to understanding the second research hypothesis (political science students are learning citizenship) and demonstrating curricular alignment to disciplinary goals.

Tables 6.17 through 6.18 present the question probing participation in a service learning project in political science classes. Response options were “yes” (coded 1), and “no” (coded 2). The frequency of “yes” and “no” responses was calculated and compared using Cramer’s V. To determine the statistical significance of the yes/no responses between the variables, this nominal data was analyzed using the explanatory statistical technique, Cramer’s V. The relationship between the variables is statistically significant ( $p$  value) at the .05 level or better. The Cramer’s V

statistic tests the null hypotheses. In Table 6.17 the null hypothesis tested is that there is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between political science and non-political science majors. Table 6.17 summarizes the response data by major.

**Table 6.17: Response to Service Learning Experience by Major**

Service learning experience	Response	
	Political Science Majors (%) ( <i>n</i> =171)	Non-Political Science Majors (%) ( <i>n</i> =54)
Yes	28	28
No	72	72

Twenty-eight percent of both political science and non-political science majors report that they had engaged in service learning experience in their political science coursework. Most respondents from both groups reported they had not engaged in service learning activities (72 percent). This indicates that few students in political science coursework have experience with service learning. However, there is no significance in the relationship between a respondent's major and their experience with service learning in their political science coursework (Cramer's  $V = .003, p > .05$ ). This is not surprising since all respondents were enrolled in political science courses, though political science majors presumably have more exposure to this coursework. Data confirm the null hypothesis in this case and demonstrates low curricular alignment to the disciplinary goal civic education.

The service learning question also probed first year and senior political science majors for information about their experiences. Data presented in Table 6.18 is useful for analyzing the null hypothesis that there is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between first year and senior political science majors.

**Table 6.18: Response to Service Learning Experience by Time in Major**

Service learning experience	Response	
	First Year Political Science Majors (%) ( <i>n</i> =12)	Senior Political Science Majors (%) ( <i>n</i> =86)
Yes	25	34
No	75	66

More senior political science majors report experience with service learning in their political science coursework (34 percent) than first year students (25 percent). This indicates that greater exposure to the coursework increases the likelihood of a service learning experience. However, respondents time in major was found not significantly associated with a positive response (Cramer's  $V = .06$ ,  $p = .55$ ). The null hypothesis in this test is confirmed.

As seen in Tables 6.17 and 6.18, most respondents indicate never having engaged in a community based or service learning project in their political science coursework. However, breaking down responses by major demonstrates whether the discipline of political science is teaching "good" citizenship (which includes engagement as well as duty) using service learning activities (also see Chapter Three

for more about service learning and citizenship). The low affirmative response rates in this area reveal a missing piece of the political science curriculum in addressing disciplinary Goal Four. Data on the fourth disciplinary goal shows that there is little student learning in civic education, and supports the conclusion from Chapter Five that there is weak curricular alignment to this disciplinary goal.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter analyzes the alignment of student learning to the four identified disciplinary goals: Knowledge of political concepts, processes, critical thinking and civic education. Results from a survey of students taking political science courses were broken out by major and time the discipline of political science. This analysis demonstrates that political science majors possess greater knowledge about political concepts than non-political science majors (disciplinary Goal One). Senior political science majors also demonstrate more knowledge of political concepts than first year political science majors. This result shows that knowledge of political concepts increases with greater exposure to political science coursework. Results also show that political science students possess greater knowledge of political processes (Goal Two). However, data does not show that senior political science majors acquire greater knowledge of political processes than first year political science majors despite greater exposure to political science coursework.

When it comes to critical thinking, Goal Three, students overall report engaging with critical thinking activities in their political science courses. However, there are no significant difference in the reporting of this experience between political science and non-political science majors, or between first year and senior political

science majors. This result does not demonstrate strong curricular alignment with disciplinary goals, though it does not conclude the total absence of curricular alignment. All students demonstrate experience with critical thinking activities in their political science coursework regardless of their major. Given the established nature of this disciplinary goal, however, it would be assumed that political science students, senior political science majors, and upper division and capstone students would report greater frequency of critical thinking experience resulting from their exposure to political science coursework.

In terms of Goal Four, citizenship or civic education, the data show a strong sense of duty among all the survey respondents when it comes to the importance of voting. Political science majors conveyed this importance to a greater degree than non-political science majors. Despite longer exposure to political science coursework, senior political science majors do not place greater importance on voting than first year political science students. Political science students reported engaging in volunteering or unconventional political participation more than non-political science students, though there was no significant difference between first year and senior political science majors in engagement. Furthermore, most students had never engaged in service learning activities which the literature suggests is one of the best ways to teach civic engagement. Student learning alignment to disciplinary Goal Four was less apparent in the analysis of survey results to these questions confirming Chapter Five's conclusion of weak political science curricular alignment to civic education. Test results are summarized in Table 6.19.

**Table 6.19: Summary of Null Hypotheses Results**

**Hypothesis Two:**

Disciplinary goals and what political science students are learning are positively reflected in the classroom.

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**Disciplinary Goal One:**

Students will attain knowledge about political systems.

**Null Hypotheses**

**Result**

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. There is no difference between political knowledge of political science and non-political science majors. | Rejected |
| 2. There is no difference between political knowledge of first year and senior political science majors.     | Rejected |

**Disciplinary Goal Two:**

Students will gain an understanding of political processes.

**Null Hypotheses**

**Result**

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between political science and non-political science majors.                        | Rejected  |
| 2. There is no difference between knowledge about political processes between first year and senior political science majors.                            | Confirmed |
| 3. There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between political science and non-political science majors. | Rejected  |
| 4. There is no difference between the understanding of the U.S. presidential primary process between first year and senior political science majors.     | Confirmed |

**Disciplinary Goal Three:**

Students will develop critical thinking skills.

**Null Hypotheses**

**Result**

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. There is no difference between political science and non-political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework. | Confirmed |
| 2. There is no difference between first year and senior political science majors in their rating of critical thinking experience in their political science coursework.     | Confirmed |
| 3. Students in capstone and upper division courses have not engaged in more critical thinking activities than students in lower division courses.                           | Confirmed |

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**Disciplinary Goal Four:**

Students will learn to be “good citizens” (citizenship) through civic education.

**Null Hypotheses****Result**

1. There is no difference in the importance that political science and non-political science majors place on voting.	Rejected
2. There is no difference in the importance that first year and senior political science majors place on voting.	Confirmed
3. There is no difference in participating in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between political science and non-political science majors.	Rejected
4. There is no difference in participation in volunteer work or unconventional political participation between first year and senior political science majors.	Confirmed
5. There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between political science and non-political science majors.	Confirmed
6. There is no difference in experiencing community based projects or service learning components in political science coursework between first year and senior political science majors.	Confirmed

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This research has presented a new way of considering curricular structures and student learning in political science by investigating the presence of identifiable disciplinary goals in political science curriculum, and the extent to which political science student learning aligns with these disciplinary goals. The overall conclusion of this research is that there are identifiable goals that define the discipline of political science. Some of these goals are adequately addressed in curricula while others are not. This analysis of curricula and student learning in political science reveals that the first goal of the discipline (students will attain knowledge about political systems) and the second goal (students will gain an understanding of how politics works), are adequately addressed in political science curricula. Students are also being exposed to curricula that addresses the third disciplinary goal of developing critical thinking skills by engaging in critical thinking activities in their political science coursework. The fourth disciplinary goal, civic education or education for citizenship, is largely absent from political science curricula and student learning.

This chapter presents further details of these conclusions and reiterates the significance of this research for teaching, learning, and assessing student learning in the discipline of political science. First, the disciplinary goals that inform this research and the two hypotheses guiding the analysis are reviewed. This is followed

by a summary of the methods used to analyze the two research hypotheses. An overview of the analyses and the conclusions drawn from these findings follows. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this research and recommendations for future research directions.

### **Disciplinary Goals**

This dissertation identifies four goals of the discipline. These goals form the context for analyzing political science curriculum and student learning. The goals of the discipline emerge from the historical developments of the field including recommendations made by the American Political Science Association and political science educators over the past century. The learning goals of Political Science are that political science students will:

1. Attain knowledge about political systems (national and international);
2. Gain an understanding of how politics works;
3. Develop critical thinking skills; and,
4. Learn to be good citizens (or civic education).

The first two goals reflect Banta's (2007) point that faculty "live" in their discipline, and Douglas's (2002) point that most faculty in higher education emphasize student learning of disciplinary content above other learning objectives. The traditional era that defines the beginnings of the discipline emphasized the importance of learning about political structures and processes, followed by the behaviorist era that stressed the importance of understanding political systems and critical thinking. The goal of critical thinking was extolled further in the post-

behavioralist era. Civic education is particularly evident in the context of state building. This is consistent with the traditional and behaviorist eras and emphasized during World War II. The goal of civic engagement and critical thinking also emerge from post-behavioral theories and from theories of education.

These four goals shape the discipline of political science but do not define the complexity and detail of the discipline. Ultimately, they are “living” goals, with political science departments and faculty shaping these goals within the context of their courses and adapting these goals to particular student populations. These goals are useful to political science, however, presentation as a cohesive academic discipline with education at the center of activity; the political science classroom becomes the environment for these goals and ideas to be developed.

This research emphasizes the potential for political science to highlight its strength and cohesion as a discipline. Learning goals are useful for underscoring cohesion in a time of mounting demands and pressures for accountability. Unlike other social science disciplines, such as sociology or psychology however, there has not been an established and collectively agreed upon set of student learning outcomes or disciplinary goals for political science. The current environment of assessment, driven by pressures for, public accountability and accreditation, has led to increasing demands for educators and departments to demonstrate what students are learning. Sociology has responded to these demands over the past twenty years with attempts to cohesively define its educational purpose as a discipline and measure student learning within this purpose. Political science now has an opportunity to enter the conversation of student learning assessment by identifying learning and curricular

structure opportunities within this environment of public accountability. The goals of political science represent the core of the discipline from which curricular and student learning should align. By emphasizing these goals, the discipline can highlight its accomplishments. This is beneficial for political science department assessment plans and reports, classroom assessment, and institutional accreditation reporting. Using these goals to guide political science curricular developments makes accountability and assessment processes “home-grown,” self defined, or “organic,” rather than driven by distant standards imposed by external demands or organizations. These goals are useful for examining curricular structures and student learning, and highlighting the discipline’s curricular cohesion, and student learning, as well as assisting with the identification of shortcomings in these areas.

### **Hypotheses Revisited**

Two research questions are addressed in this dissertation. These questions examine alignment of disciplinary goals with political science curricular structures and student learning. Specific questions guide this research are as follows:

3. To what extent are disciplinary goals aligned with the curriculum of political science?
4. To what extent is science student learning aligned with the goals of political science?

Operationalizing these research questions requires formulating testable hypotheses.

These hypotheses are discussed below.

## Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis tested in this research is that the goals of the political science discipline are aligned with curricula offered by political science departments in the United States. The first hypothesis emerges from a century of recommendations calling for political science departments to implement course sequencing to guide students through the breadth and depth of the literature in political science. The Committee of Seven (1915) recommended greater rigor in student learning of American government and the 1926 work of Robert Story suggested that the discipline look at curricular structures and consider strengthening methodology coursework that underscore critical thinking. The 1942 Committee of the American Political Science Association on War-Time Changes in Political Science Curriculum added to Story's recommendation by suggesting that course sequencing had great potential for building critical thinking skills. The emphasis on civic education came into the discussion more directly with the 1951 APSA recommendations that the discipline educate for citizenship and service or duty. Topics including content knowledge, critical thinking, and citizenship reappeared in the 1991 *Wahlke Report*. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Roundtable on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science re-emphasized the need to create disciplinary student learning outcomes in light of the demands on higher education for greater public accountability.<sup>1</sup> This research demonstrates that political science has largely

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the context of accountability for public institutions of higher education see the Spellings' Report, U.S. Department of Education 2006, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, and current 2010 Department of Education mandates for accountability and assessment of learning in higher education

incorporated recommendations for course sequencing, but has not necessarily incorporated other the disciplinary goals embedded within these recommendations.

Dezure (2008) suggested that higher education prescribe more precise course sequencing for students to build cohesive education experiences. Wahlke made similar recommendations to the discipline of political science in 1991. According to the *Wahlke Report* (1991), offering sequential learning is the best approach for teaching students in the discipline. The *Report* argued that without a structured curriculum with courses offered in a sequential manner students were less likely to “complete their work with any sense of having mastered some ‘common core’ of knowledge that they share with other majors (1991, 51). The *Report* also argued that because of the theoretical and paradigmatic debates in the discipline of political science, the discipline has struggled overtime with creating a cohesive curriculum.

Testing of the first research hypothesis involved analysis of alignment between the curricular requirements and the disciplinary goals. Testing this hypothesis necessitated looking for the presence of course sequencing models. This research replicates the work of Kaufman-Osborn who identified course sequencing in political science departments.

A sample of political science departments was selected using the Carnegie Foundation’s classification schema for categorizing institutions of higher education by enrollment, research status, and degree offerings. A sample of 41 college and university political science departments was selected to participate in this study. The content of website information, department documents, and degree requirements from departments were examined. Observations about course offerings and embedded

goals were documented and analyzed for the presence of curricular alignment with disciplinary goals.

This analysis demonstrated that curricular structures of political science departments tend to reflect recommendations made to the discipline over the past century. Most political science programs required introductory courses that establish the foundation of the major. This foundation frequently included the common American government and politics course and introductory courses in the discipline's main subfields identified by Kaufman-Osborn (2006). Political science majors were often directed through a series of courses frequently culminating in a senior or capstone level course. This course sequencing embodies the path by which students establish foundational knowledge of the disciplinary content and then proceed with application of this content using skills of critical thinking and analysis. Education for citizenship, or civic education appear less frequently in the curriculum. In all, the presence of course sequencing in the sample departments reflected identified disciplinary goals, to varying degrees. Content analysis of a sample of course syllabi provided a more detailed snapshot of the presence of the four disciplinary goals in the political science curriculum.

A sample of course syllabi was collected from one political science department, representative of a mid-size unit in a four year university. This department was assistive with providing a sample of syllabi from introductory or foundational courses and end of program or senior capstone course requirement. The syllabi were reviewed for evidence of the disciplinary goals as reflected stated course student learning outcomes. This review of syllabi shows clearly that political science

educators emphasize student acquisition of disciplinary knowledge (Goals One and Two), more so than critical thinking and civic education (Goals Three and Four). This finding resembles Wright's (2007) assertion that faculty members give primary importance to the acquisition of knowledge and student learning in disciplinary content areas. Acquisition of critical thinking skills (Goal Three) is also present in many, though not all, of the syllabi reviewed. Notably absent was the goal of teaching (Goal Four) students to be good citizens, or education for citizenship. Despite being present in recommendations to the discipline over a century, few courses included in the syllabi analysis mentioned this goal. This begs the question of whether the goal of civic education is useful or relevant to the discipline of political science despite its persistence in recommendations made to the discipline.

The goal of civic education does not prescribe one definition or meaning to the concept of citizenship. Donald (2002) stated that for social scientists, "knowledge in their disciplines is time- and culture-dependent, which in turn led to an abandonment of the quest for a unifying theory in the social sciences" (133). The author attributes this failure to create a unified theory in the social sciences to the internationalization of the social science disciplines in the late nineteenth century. The history of political science, as presented in Chapter Two, demonstrates how rich debates have contributed to the discipline's evolution towards a diverse rather than a unified identity.

This research does not argue for a disciplinary identity unified by a common theoretical model, rather an identity unified by a set of common learning goals that can be sculpted by various perspectives and theoretical models. For example, the



concept of “citizenship” lends itself to many constructions. Citizenship as a goal does not imply one type of citizen or definition of a “good” citizen. Citizenship encompasses duty and engagement, both situated in the democratic tradition of this discipline. In this research, acquisition of citizenship goals is associated with Goal Three, acquisition of critical thinking skills. Citizenship involves critical thinking and critical thinking is central to duty (i.e., voting or participation) and engagement (i.e., community volunteer work or service learning activities). Regardless of the broad nature of the term “civic education,” the concept did not appear all that frequently in department curriculum or course syllabi. Considering Goals Three and Four together in the analysis of curricular structures and course syllabi reveals that political science curriculum reflects the conditions for civic education to be learned and practiced. These results are confirmed in the testing of the second hypothesis of this research.

### **Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis tested in this research states that a positive relationship exists between disciplinary goals and what students are actually learning and experiencing in their political science coursework. This hypothesis was formulated with consideration of increasing demands on institutions of higher education to demonstrate student learning through rigorous assessment processes. This research recognizes the absence of standardized ways to assess student learning and does not advocate that standardized mechanisms for assessing student learning be implemented. Instead, the testing hypothesis two assumes the identification of disciplinary goals and their presence in curricular structures. After identifying

disciplinary goals and determining that these goals appear to varying degrees in political science curricula, the research turned to the question of whether student learning reflects disciplinary goals. Measuring student learning is an ambitious task. The approach employed in this research has never been attempted with the political science discipline level across institutions.

The second hypothesis was tested using a quasi-experimental design involving a survey of political science majors and non-majors. Survey results were used to analyze student learning alignment with the four disciplinary goals. Survey responses were analyzed by major (political science majors and non-political science majors) to determine if political science majors exhibited greater alignment with disciplinary goals than non-political science majors. The responses of first year and senior political science majors were also compared to see if there was a discernable difference in student learning and experience after exposure to political science coursework over several years of study or at the completion of the degree.

Survey results paralleled earlier findings. Overall student learning showed greatest alignment with disciplinary Goals One and Two involving acquisition of specific types of knowledge. This was followed by some degree of alignment to the third disciplinary goal, acquiring critical thinking skills. Survey responses showed that students did not give much importance to citizenship (participation and engagement) and that they had not experienced activities related to civic education in their political science courses. These results indicated a weak alignment to the fourth disciplinary goal.

It is not surprising that political science major respondents answered these knowledge questions about political systems and processes more accurately than non-political science major respondents given their coursework in the discipline. It is surprising however, that response accuracy was not greater among senior political science majors than first year political science majors. This later result is difficult to assess given differences in coursework experiences and an inability to know the actual number of political science courses taken by each respondent. Future analysis of this difference could include evaluating transcripts among senior political science students to identify the presence of common course sequencing in their political science experience. Despite this lack of discernable differences between answers of first year and senior political science majors, survey results confirm that political science majors as a group have greater knowledge of political systems, structures, and processes than non-political science majors.

Similarly, all respondent report having frequently engaged in critical thinking activities in their political science coursework. There are no differences between the reporting of political science and non-political science majors or between first year and senior political science majors when it comes to experiences with critical thinking activities in the political science classroom. These results were surprising given the frequency of critical thinking as a desired student learning outcome, as listed in examined syllabi, the proclivity of political science departments to identify critical thinking in curricular structures, and the frequency with which critical thinking has appeared over the century of recommendations to the discipline. Given the preponderance of critical thinking as a desired learning outcome in political science,

and as one of the discipline's most common features, it is surprising the political science students do not report greater experience with critical thinking activities in the political science classroom.

Similar to results of the curriculum analysis, the disciplinary goal, education for citizenship, is not resoundingly evident in the experiences of most survey respondents. While political science majors exhibit a greater sense of duty in terms of valuing the importance of voting and political participation than non-political science majors, survey results do not convey an overwhelming sense of civic engagement or experience with engagement within political science coursework and course activities. This is evident in the lack of service learning experience among political science majors.

The paucity of civic education in political science coursework confirms Putnam's (2000) assertion of a decline in civic engagement across society over the past decades. As stated in Chapter Three, civic education, or education for citizenship, is a reoccurring theme in the literature. It is a value evident in state mandates, specifically in states like California that require students graduating from public colleges and universities to take a course covering federal and state constitutions. It is unusual that despite a growing body of literature emphasizing experiential learning as a means for acquiring critical thinking skills and a sense of civic engagement that integration of service learning activities is not more apparent in the political science classroom. This finding confirms the 2001 work of Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama who say the focus on civic education in political science curriculum has faded over time.

## Conclusion

This research contributes to a growing literature on curricular structures and student learning by starting with the disciplinary goals of political science and testing for the presence of these goals in political science curricula and student learning. This research replicates the work of Kaufman-Osborn (2006) and Ishiyama and Breuning (2008), and explores territory beyond these earlier studies. This research demonstrates the presence of course structures that reflect more than a century of recommendations made to the discipline. While the discipline is not resistant to change, it is slow to incorporate new ideas. Perhaps more accurately, the discipline has simply evolved slowly in response to cultural, societal, and political demands placed on its structure. Additionally, this research shows that the discipline of political science has an opportunity to embrace the current societal trends by highlighting student learning within the discipline. When a student majors in political science, that student should have a clear idea understanding of disciplinary goals and a reasonable expectation of what they will learn in the political science curriculum.

As found, the political science curriculum and student learning aligns with the first three identified goals of the discipline, and less so to the fourth disciplinary goal. There is greater need to examine the presence of civic education or citizenship in political science curriculum and student learning. Concluding remarks in this chapter address how departments can best make use of these recommendations.

## Limitations and Strengths of this Study

Limitations encountered in this research are mostly related to the scope of the project, including sample sizes used for data collection. The strengths of this work are in its potential for replication, and in its contribution to the literature on teaching and learning in political science. This research helps promote the place of political science within the array of social science disciplines in higher education.

This research relied upon drawing two national samples: a sample of political science departments and a sample of political science students from 41 institutions. Ideally, future research in the area will include a more inclusive sample representative of a range of institutions. Also, a national sample of students would ideally be large enough to capture groups of political science majors at various points in the political science program. Reaching a large sample of political science students from departments across the country presented challenges. This approach requires the cooperation and assistance of political science department chairs and faculty. The research, teaching, and administrative loads of these department members are extensive and their responses to inquiries made in the research reflected as much.<sup>2</sup> Participation in a broad dissertation research project was not a priority. The value of this type of research needs to be clearly demonstrated to political science departments. While many department chairs were interested and supportive of this research, many failed to respond to requests for participation. Using more aggressive recruitment tactics would assist in greater response rates. In the end, these limitations

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<sup>2</sup> One department chair refused to publicize the survey or participate in this study. The chair responded to requests with an email explaining that his political science department was over-inundated with assessment requirements and that adding another assessment element to the mix would not be received favorably by department faculty. This resistance was understandable as many institutions are increasing assessment requirements due to accreditation demands.

reveal more about the potential for similar research rather than pitfalls. These limitations were addressed to some extent in this research. The sample size of limitations was addressed by looking at the specific case study of sample syllabi from one institution and delving deeper into curricular structures of the 41 institutions.

The quasi-experimental design used to test the second research hypothesis is a model that can be replicated in the future. The quasi-experimental approach represents a usable starting point for further research. As a result of the methodological design this research presents a more detailed snapshot of the discipline and the discipline in practice today.

### **Recommendations and Future Directions**

The picture painted in this study is useful for identifying questions for political science departments and the discipline as a whole to consider in future research. Similar research could be conducted by political science departments that are already compiling institutionally mandated program reviews. Program reviews are intended to be opportunities for departments to reflect on their goals and student learning objectives, and to systematically examine the structures and processes they use. If political science departments relate information gathered in their program reviews to data collected at the level of the discipline, workable information for programs could be generated and a cohesive picture of the discipline painted. This collectivity of energy and voices will contribute to meaningful conversations about “what political science does, and how it achieves its goals.” Conclusions reached in this study are encouraging of continued research in this area.

The analysis of findings demonstrates that the discipline of political science has slowly considered and integrated recommendations made over the past 100 years. From the presence of the ubiquitous American government and politics course as a foundation for the political science major's study to availability of the senior capstone or end of program course, recommendations have found their way into political science curriculum. These recommendations should continue to be considered, discussed and debated. This research has shown that the senior capstone or end of program course is not available in every political science program, despite Wahlke's 1991 recommendation. According to the 2007 National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) report, students report deeper learning as a result of engagement in service learning activities. The report called engagement activities "deep approaches to learning." The report identified the culminating senior experience as one of these deep approaches stating: "Deep approaches to learning are important because students who use these approaches tend to earn higher grades, and retain, integrate and transfer information at higher rates" (2007, 13). Political science departments should consider implementing these recommendations given the evidence of their usefulness.<sup>3</sup>

This research shows that while most students engage in critical thinking activities in their political science courses, political science students do not have any greater experience with critical thinking activities than their non-political science counterparts. Both political science majors and non-political science majors indicate

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<sup>3</sup> The NSSE report also explained that senior culminating experiences are considered to be: "Opportunities to integrate, synthesize, and apply knowledge essential to deep, meaningful learning experiences" (2009, 19). The intention of a capstone course is to offer students an opportunity to apply what they have learned in their field. The 2007 NSSE report also states that "Only 29% of seniors at public institutions did a culminating experience" (2007, 13).



frequently engaging in activities where they analyze the basic elements of an idea or theory. This illustrates that students are learning the basic content of the discipline as identified in disciplinary Goals One and Two. Results indicate that students have been introduced to theories, and they have applied and used these theories for some analytical activities. Political science curriculum developers should consider this an opportunity to develop activities that encourage political science students to reflect upon and analyze their own beliefs and to explore alternative positions and perspectives. This type of higher order thinking should occur in the end of program course.

The fact that there is no significant difference between the experience of first year and senior political science majors with critical thinking activities should also be pondered by political science educators. This finding speaks to the need for a senior capstone or end of program experience designed to challenge political science majors to apply knowledge and evaluate material and issues, justifying positions and arguments. The finding that senior political science majors report only sometimes engaging in analytical activities in their political science courses indicates a potential for improvement in this area.

It is also important to consider these findings in light of the debate about civic education, citizenship, and education for democracy. More than half (54 percent) of all senior political science majors responding to the survey never participated in a community-based project as part of their political science coursework. This number is high for a discipline that emphasizes critical thinking and civic education in much of its literature and in its evolution. Political science departments have an opportunity

how to not simply create “good” citizens who vote, but to also cultivate critically thinking citizens who engage in their communities and who think systematically about the problems faced by society. These are the citizens who will step up to help develop solutions to these problems.

Finally, this research contributes the idea of using learning goals as a framework for designing curriculum that builds on an understanding of learning as a developmental process. Outcomes of these processes should continue to be a focus of faculty and department conversations. Developing knowledge of political concepts and political processes, critical thinking and education for citizenship requires a diversity of teaching methods and styles. The approach recommended here is broad and flexible enough to be used for designing lower and upper division coursework.

Student learning and the skills students are expected to acquire are highly determined by the culture of faculty, the mix of students, and the tradition and expertise within each department and institution. When professionally analyzed and consulted by educators, disciplinary goals serve as guides for the application and assessment of desired skills. Taking up the discussion about disciplinary goals opens an arena for teachers of political science to use the very skills that are asking students to use: synthesis, application, and evaluation.

### **Significance of this Research to the Discipline of Political Science**

This research concludes that disciplinary goals align to some extent with student learning in political science. This research offers a practical component useful

for understanding the discipline of political science and its pedagogical significance in higher education.

While not a recommendation to the discipline, the current plan for higher education under President Obama's administration has implications for political science and other disciplines. This plan is similar to the accreditation demands and the directives of the 1996 Spellings' *Report*. The increased call for transparency includes the push to produce college graduates at the same rates as other industrialized nations.<sup>4</sup> This push underscores the necessity for educators to clearly establish and provide evidence of meeting student learning outcomes. Political science has an opportunity to demonstrate to institutions and the state standards and accomplishments of student learning in the discipline.

In his review of the state of the discipline, Kaufman-Osborn (2006) described political science as a discipline struggling to find an identity. This research demonstrates that the discipline's identity is discoverable in a century of recommendations. Further, the identity of political science is not stagnant and unchanging. Rather, the evidence suggests that in the context of accountability, accreditation, and assessment, this identity provides a starting point for disciplinary self-examination, change and revitalization. Examining and gathering data about disciplinary goals at the curricular and student learning levels will make the discipline of political science an example of public accountability, strengthen its effectiveness in

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<sup>4</sup> This message continues with the current Obama administration's Department of Education under the direction of Secretary Arne Duncan. President Obama's current plan for higher education, for example, is to produce more graduates. Pushing this agenda is Under Secretary Martha Kanter who at a 2010 address to the American Association of Community Colleges "said college graduation rates had remained stagnant too long. The relatively low number of Americans who complete a college degree, compared with other countries, is 'a national tragedy'... 'We have to get people to the finish line,' she said. 'We have to get them to graduate'" (Gonzalez 2010).

educating students, and assist in the creation of self-sustaining processes for assessing its curriculum and student learning.

Educators in the discipline of political science should draw from these conclusions as seem fitting. These conclusions should inspire political science departments and faculty to re-examine curriculum and course structures with the question: what is a political science education? and, are our students learning what we think they should be learning? This research should motivate political science departments and faculty to try new pedagogical approaches and, in turn, to challenge disciplinary goals. While the crux of this research establishes a vehicle for political science education, it remains up to its educators to drive the discipline.

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## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

### INSTITUTIONS

1. Western Oregon University
2. University of Texas at Tyler, The
3. Central Connecticut State University
4. Columbus State University
5. Rhode Island College
6. Marshall University
7. University of Alaska Anchorage
8. Old Dominion University
9. California State University-Fullerton
10. Middle Tennessee State University
11. University of North Florida
12. University of North Carolina-Wilmington
13. San Diego State University
14. Valdosta State University
15. Towson University
16. Florida State University
17. Oregon State University
18. University of Utah
19. University of Nevada-Reno
20. San Francisco State University
21. California State University-Long Beach
22. University of New Orleans
23. University of New Mexico-Main Campus
24. CUNY Brooklyn College
25. Northern Kentucky University
26. Colorado State University
27. University of Arizona
28. Oakland University
29. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
30. University of Missouri-St. Louis
31. CUNY College of Staten Island
32. University of Kansas Main Campus
33. California State University-Chico
34. Arizona State University at the Tempe Campus
35. Texas State University-San Marcos
36. Southern Utah University
37. Indiana University-South Bend
38. Midwestern State University
39. Augusta State University
40. East Tennessee State University
41. Emporia State University

## APPENDIX B

### SURVEY PROTOCOL

This survey is part of a dissertation research project for a Ph.D. student at Northern Arizona University. The purpose of this research is to document student learning in political science. This research includes administering a survey to first and last year political science students at a purposeful sample asking 41 colleges and universities to participate. The intention of the survey is to assess how well first year political science majors (and intended political science majors) feel prepared in political science, and how graduating political science students feel about the knowledge they have gained and how they have met the learning goals of Political Science. The results of this research will provide information about student learning in the discipline of political science that will be used to analyze the overall goals of and curriculum structures in the discipline.

#### I. Informed Consent

Dear Respondent,

I am inviting you participate in a research project to study student learning in the discipline of political science. This research is part of a Ph.D. dissertation in political science and the primary investigator is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ. This letter directs you to an online survey that asks a variety of questions about your political knowledge, your understanding about how politics works, your critical thinking skills, and your education for citizenship. It should take you about 5-10 minutes to complete online. Once complete, you can choose to be entered into a drawing for a \$50 gift card to Barnes and Noble (there will be 4 of these cards offered so your chances of winning are good).

The results of this project will be used to analyze the overall goals of and curriculum structures in the discipline. I hope that the results of the survey will also be useful for political science department's own student learning assessment data and feedback. I hope to share my results by compiling the data into a useful form for your political science department. There are no identifiable risks to you if you decide to participate in this survey and your responses will not be identified with you personally. Only I will see individual surveys, and none will have identifying information that will be shared with anyone else. If you choose to enter the drawing, you will need to provide a mailing address, but this will not be associated with your survey responses.

I hope you will take the time to complete this online survey. The decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. Regardless of whether you choose to participate, please let me know if you would like a summary of my findings. To receive a summary, please contact me at the email address below. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northern Arizona University has approved this study. If you

have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the Institutional Review Board by telephone (928-523-4626).

Sincerely.

Katie Desmond,  
Ph.D. candidate  
Northern Arizona University

## II. Directions for Administering Survey

1. Please distribute, via email or flyer, the information about the survey to the students in your 100 or 200 level class. The email and flyer have the instructions for logging on to the survey.
2. The survey site will have the letter of informed consent, "Invitation to Participate" for students to read.

## III. Directions for Students Taking Online Survey

1. Please enter the Survey Monkey website.
2. Please read the informed consent letter entitled "Invitation to Participate."
3. Complete the answer next to the number of the question you are answering. Some questions offer an "I don't know" option." Please be honest here (your responses are confidential). This option is used to reduce guessing and thus reduce error
4. Submit your completed survey.
5. Provide your contact information if you wish to be eligible for the \$50 Barnes and Noble gift card drawing.

## APPENDIX C

### SURVEY

#### Goal 1: Knowledge of political systems

Question 1: A “representative democracy” is a form of government in which:

- a. all or most citizens govern directly.
- b. a monarch is elected to represent a people.
- c. a president’s cabinet is popularly elected.
- d. those elected by the people govern on their behalf.
- e. I don't know

Question 2: What is federalism?

- a. A political party at the time of the Founding
- b. A set of essays defending the Constitution
- c. A political system where the national government has ultimate power
- d. A political system where state and national governments share power
- e. I don't know

Question 3: What are the three branches of government?

- a. executive, legislative, judicial
- b. executive, legislative, military
- c. bureaucratic, military, industry
- d. federal, state, local
- e. I don't know

Question 5: Which of the following countries have a communist form of government?

- a. Russia
- b. Mexico
- c. Cuba
- d. Iran
- e. I don't know

Question 6: Who is the author of this well know phrase, "And the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short?"

- a. Thomas Hobbes
- b. Robert Keohane
- c. John Locke
- d. Thucydides
- e. I don't know

Question 7: The major powers at odds with each other in the “Cold War” were the United States and:

- a. Germany.
- b. Iran.
- c. Vietnam.
- d. the Soviet Union.
- e. I don't know

Question 8: What kind of government is a *junta*?

- a. Military
- b. Religious
- c. Populist
- d. Social democratic
- e. I don't know

Goal 2: Understanding of how politics works

Question 4: In the area of US foreign policy, Congress shares power with the:

- a. President
- b. Supreme Court
- c. State governments
- d. United Nations
- e. I don't know

Question 9: Using a scale from 1-10 where a 1 means you have absolutely no understanding of the process and a 10 means you have thorough understanding of the process, please rate your understanding of the presidential primary.

Question 10: The power of judicial review was established in:

- a. the Constitution.
- b. *Marbury v. Madison*.
- c. *McCulloch v. Maryland*.
- d. the Bill of Rights.
- e. I don't know

Question 11: “Balance of power” refers to:

- a. a state that seeks to expand its power generates resistance by other states.
- b. states that are militarily powerful tend to acquire strong allies.
- c. weaker states tend to “join the winner” in most international conflicts.
- d. land and sea powers have tended to balance one another.
- e. I don't know

- Question 12: The international legal concept of sovereignty allows countries to:
- Select a king to govern or rule
  - Use its military to invade another country
  - Make its own political decisions.
  - Trade good and services on international markets.
  - I don't know

Goal 3: Critical thinking skills

Question 13: Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Question 14: Analyzed the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Question 15: Made judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Question 16: Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Goal 4: Education for Citizenship

Question 17: Community service or volunteer work

- Very Often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Question 18: Voting in local, state, or national elections

- a. Very Important
- b. Important
- c. Sometimes
- d. Never

Question 19: Participated in a rally, demonstration or protest.

- a. Very Often
- b. Often
- c. Sometimes
- d. Never

Question 16: Participated in a community based project (e.g. service learning) as part of a political science course

- a. Yes
- b. No