



Department of Government: Assessing Substantive Knowledge in Political Science with a Field Test

Learning Objective

Substantive Knowledge of Political Science:
Students will understand the institutions, processes and values that underpin political behavior and events.

KPI

Department establishes two KPI for learning objective of substantive knowledge of Political Science

- Percentage of students completing major requirements with a minimum 2.0 GPA.
- Evaluation of participation in Washington and Frankfort internships and cooperative education experiences.

Rationale for Grant: Additional Assessment Instrument

Existing KPI for learning objective not what department would like:

- Retention of material after courses
- Grades an indirect, not direct, measure of objective
- Don't allow for reflection on department curriculum

Additional method for measuring objective

- Field test of substantive knowledge

Constraints

- Time
- Money

Solution: university assistance to begin development of new measure

Field Test: Process

1. Order Major Field Aptitude Tests (MFAT) from Educational Testing Service (ETS)
 - ETS also produces standardized exams such as SAT, GRE
 - Other Kentucky institutions administering MFAT: Cumberland College, Georgetown College, Morehead State University, Murray State University, Transylvania University
2. Identify students “eligible” to take exam: the population
3. Select sample of students for exam
4. Administer exam
5. Receive and analyze results

Test Administration: Spring and Fall 2005

MFAT administered to 10 students on 4/28/2005

- 5 Seniors
- 5 Sophomores

MFAT administered to 15 students on 12/9/2005

- 13 Seniors
- 2 Juniors

Results

Spring 2005

Seniors

Avg. total score: 154.4

Avg. percentile: 61

Sophomores

Avg. total score: 151.6

Avg. percentile: 56 (compared with seniors—no data on other sophomores)

Fall 2005

Seniors

Avg. total score: 153.5

Avg. percentile: 59

Juniors

Avg. total score: 150.5

Avg. percentile: 55 (compared with seniors—no data on other juniors)

ETS also provides sub scores by subfield in the discipline and by types of assessment (e.g. analytical & critical thinking, methodology)

Use of Results and Future Plans

MFAT to be administered to 13 students in April/May 2006

- 13 remaining exams from original 38 purchased from ETS

Ongoing discussion of interpretation of results and development of KPI for the MFAT

- Because the MFAT is not currently part of the KPI in the department action plan, no standards exist for determination of meeting student objective measured
- Sense that scores not as high as we would hope
- Sense that disparity between sophomore and senior scores not as great as we would hope

Ongoing faculty discussion regarding use of standardized test as assessment instrument for student learning objectives

- Plans to begin development of “internal” field test Spring/Summer 2006
- Field test can be used as measure of both Substantive Knowledge of Political Science (learning objective identified in assessment grant proposal) and Critical Thinking, Methodology, and Communication

Ongoing discussion by department Undergraduate Curriculum Committee regarding strengths and weaknesses of program

- Identification of subfields with stronger/weaker student substantive knowledge
- Identification of indicators with stronger/weaker student performance