






***Online Assessment Tracking Database***

Sam Houston State University (SHSU)  
2014 - 2015

**Political Science MA**

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<b>Goal</b>	<b>Written Comprehensive Exams</b>  Students will gain knowledge and skills that are associated with advanced degrees in political science.
<b>Objective (L)</b>	<b>Written Comprehensive Exams</b>  Upon completion of the MA in Political Science program, students will be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain the key features of methodology.</li> <li>2. Evaluate political theories and discuss the significant research in one of the program's subject areas: American government, public administration, comparative politics, or international relations.</li> </ol>
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Successful Completion Of Written Comprehensive Exams</b>  We utilize written comprehensive exams as a tool for measuring graduate students' knowledge and skills. Prior to graduation, students complete two written comprehensive exams in areas relevant to their coursework. Exam questions are written by faculty with expertise in the students' areas of study and the questions are based on the comprehensive exam reading lists and the content of the overview courses (see department level goal of revise written comprehensive exam process for more information on the reading lists and overview courses). Students' exams are graded by at least two faculty members (more when possible) who have expertise in the areas of study pursued by students. Exams are assigned one of the following scores: high pass, pass, and no pass. If the two faculty members issue conflicting scores (e.g., pass and no pass), a third faculty member will be asked to score the exams and issue a final ruling.
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Written Comprehensive Exams</b>  We expect that at least 80% of our students will pass their exams on the first attempt and that 100% of the students who have to take the exam a second time will pass.
<b>Finding</b>	<b>Comprehensive Exam Results</b>  The new comprehensive exam format consist of two sections. Five students took exams in spring and summer 2015. On the first round of exams two out of five students received high passes on the first and second sections, two out of five students received passes on the first section and fails on the second section, and one student received fails on both sections. All three students who took sections of the exam a second time passed.  On section one of the exam, four out of five students passed the exam with two receiving high passes. Thus, we were pleased with students performance on the first section of the exams. Three out of five students failed the second

section of the exam, but passed the second section on their second attempt. Although the three students passed on the second section on their second attempt, the rate of passes on the second section of the exam needs to improve.

### Action

#### Written Comprehensive Exams 🔑

The MA in Political Science will move completely online in fall 2016. The move will require faculty to re-evaluate the program curriculum and thus the content and delivery mode of the comprehensive exams. The MA director and faculty will use this coming year to make the necessary changes in the curriculum and comprehensive exams.

### Goal

#### Improve Students' Critical Thinking Skills 🔑

Students will learn to think critically and reflectively.

### Objective (L)

#### Changing The Written Comprehensive Exam Process 🔑

MA faculty wish to design a comprehensive exam process that will require students to rely more on informed reflection and less on memorization when preparing for the exams. The written comprehensive exam questions will be rewritten to require students to demonstrate reflective and critical thought.

### Indicator

#### Exam Process Revisions 🔑

The MA director, in consultation with faculty from the discipline's subfields, will develop a database of exam questions designed to require students to demonstrate critical thought.

### Criterion

#### Exam Process Revisions 🔑

The new comprehensive exam questions will be developed in the fall of 2014 and implemented in the spring of 2015. We believe the new questions will decrease the amount of memorization based exam answers and increase the amount of critical thinking based exam answers.

### Finding







#### Number Of High Passes Awarded 🔑

We were pleased to see two students receive high passes on their first attempts on the first section of the exam.

### Action

#### Critical Thinking Skills 🔑

The MA in Political Science will move completely online in fall 2016. The move will require faculty to re-evaluate the program curriculum and thus the content and delivery mode of the comprehensive exams. The MA director and faculty will use this coming year to make the necessary changes in the curriculum and comprehensive exams.

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Graduate Student Writing Skills</b>  Graduate students will develop strong writing skills
<b>Objective (L)</b>	<b>Improving Graduate Student Writing Skills</b>  The writing skills of students will improve during their first year in the program.
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Identifying Students With Weak Writing Skills</b>  At the beginning of each semester the MA director will send graduate faculty the names of all students new to the program. Faculty will alert the director to any new student whose first written assignment indicates weak writing skills. Two faculty members will assess the sample and confirm the weaknesses.
<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Improved Writing Skills</b>  We believe the writing skills of students who are referred to the Writing Center will improve. Two or more faculty who cited the weak student evaluate a second writing after the student has received training at the SHSU Writing Center. All referred students must show demonstrated improvement to the satisfaction of the assessing faculty.
<b>Finding</b>	<b>Results Of Efforts To Improve Writing Skills</b>  Overall, MA faculty noticed a difference in the quality of some students' application writing samples (all prospective students must submit a writing sample) and written work submitted in classes. Class written assignments were weaker than application writing samples. Faculty hypothesized the submitted writing samples for the application process represented highly polished texts possibly achieved with coaching. The first paper intervention process was designed to identify such instances and rapidly bring students to consistent improved writing performance. During the AY 2014/2015 one student was identified as in need of improvement. The student worked with Writing Center. Subsequently, two faculty members confirmed writing improved to the acceptable graduate performance level. The student also raised their overall GPA significantly between the alert to poor writing and the sessions with the Writing Center.
<b>Action</b>	<b>Writing Skills</b>  The MA in Political Science will move completely online in fall 2016. The pool of prospective students for the online degree include full time professionals in the fields of education, government, and non-profits. We expect that this pool of prospective students will possess strong writing skills. Thus, the need to monitor incoming students' writing may fade as new students enter the program. If this is not the case, we will design a strategy appropriate for improving

the writing skills of students who are taking courses online rather than face-to-face.

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### **Previous Cycle's "Plan for Continuous Improvement"**

In fall of 2014 a new chair was appointed and the department adopted a five year strategic plan. As a result of these changes, the department's plan for continuous improvement has changed.

Goal 1: Expand Assessment of Student Learning and Department Performance:

(1) Develop and administer entrance and exit surveys that are designed to provide information about student learning and economic impact of the degree programs. Possible survey questions might include: How has the program contributed to your knowledge of the field? Do you believe the program improved your ability to perform your professional duties? Did the program contribute to your ability to obtain a promotion, salary increase, etc.?

Goal 2: Improve the Comprehensive Exam Process:

(1) Revise the comprehensive exam process so as to offer graduate students more preparation for the exams. The MA director, in consultation with faculty from the disciplines subfields, will develop a database of exam questions and set an agreed upon schedule for when students begin preparing for exam and when exams are administered.

Goal 3: Improve Graduate Student Writing Skills and Implement an Early Warning System for Students Who are at Risk

(1) At the beginning of each semester the MA director will send all graduate faculty the names of students new to the program. Faculty will be asked to alert the director to any new student whose first written assignment indicates weak writing skills. Students with weak writing skills will be referred to the Writing Center.

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**Please detail the elements of your previous "Plan for Continuous Improvement" that were implemented. If elements were not implemented please explain why, along with any contextual challenges you may have faced that prevented their implementation.**

Changes to the written comprehensive exams were implemented and efforts to address graduate students' writing skills were made.

**Plan for Continuous Improvement - Please detail your plan for improvement that you have developed based on what you learned from your 2014 - 2015 Cycle Findings.**

This coming year the department will begin taking the steps necessary to move the MA online. The move towards an online program will likely affect the type of students we recruit (i.e., traditional students versus full time professionals), the reasons the students are pursuing the degree (e.g., wanting to use a MA as a means of getting into doctoral programs versus using a MA as a means of furthering an existing professional career), etc. The director and MA Committee will use this coming year to rethink key aspects of the program, such as: student learning objectives and program curriculum, comprehensive exam processes that are conducive to an online program, measurement tools that can be used to measure students' skill and knowledge before entering the program and upon graduating from the program, etc.

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