

Department of History, Politics and International Relations Assessment Plan

Mission of Program

The Department of History, Politics and International Relations at Webster University offers students a strong liberal arts education and excellent career preparation.

Students develop the skills they need to analyze and interpret today's world. Courses in the department are not about the recitation of "facts." Instead we learn how to manage the flood of information that is all around us, and to organize relevant facts into compelling and persuasive stories. In addition, students in the department develop invaluable skills such as reading, writing, public speaking, and critical thinking.

The department offers undergraduate majors in History, Political Science, Political Science with an emphasis in Public Law, International Relations, and American Studies. Each major requires students to take courses in other disciplines in the department, reflecting the faculty's strong commitment to an interdisciplinary curriculum. Students are also encouraged to enhance their learning experience through study abroad and internships.

General Department Objectives and Outcomes

1. Students will be able to express their insights and ideas clearly in writing and produce a research paper (at least 12 pages long) that uses multiple sources and contains proper source citations.
2. Students will be able to read scholarly books and articles, and analyze those works critically in conversations with faculty and their peers.
3. Students will be able to find and utilize relevant sources/resources to answer questions in their discipline.
4. Students will be able to understand different interpretations and theoretical perspectives in their discipline, and, further, understand how differing interpretations arise and evolve in an ongoing dialogue.
5. Students will be able to understand and comment upon the complex relationship between contemporary issues and historical events.

Discipline Specific Objectives for Undergraduate Majors.

History

1. Students will be familiar with the outlines of the history of the modern world, i.e., since 1500.
2. Students will be familiar in some depth with the history of one geographic area or historical epoch.
3. Students will be able to make historical arguments using concrete illustrations and examples.

Political Science

1. Students will be able to put contemporary political issues in historical context and to use historical facts in building arguments about politics.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with the political institutions and processes of the United States.
3. Students will be able to understand and evaluate the international and transnational dimensions of particular problems and policies.
4. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with several methods and analytical approaches used by political scientists to examine political institutions and processes.

Public Law (in addition to above)

1. Students will be able to demonstrate familiarity with the structures and processes of the judicial branch of both state and U.S. governments.
2. Students will be able to analyze and evaluate the role of the judiciary as a political actor.

International Relations

1. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of key subfields and theories of International Relations as a discipline.
2. Students will be able to identify major actors and institutions of international relations and to know their functions.
3. Students will be able to analyze international issues from perspectives other than their own.
4. Students will be able to display familiarity with foreign cultures and languages.

American Studies

1. Students will be familiar with American culture and institutions in the past and present.
2. Students will demonstrate a knowledge of different disciplinary approaches to the study of American culture.

Assessment tools:

1. Course Syllabi
2. Course Evaluation Instruments (sample evaluation form attached).
3. Overview scores and Overview Exit Questionnaire
4. Research Papers

Assessment Process/plan:

1. Collect course syllabi with learning objectives for each course and review syllabi for assignments that measure the learning objectives.
2. Student evaluation of courses and instructors
3. Review Overview process, student score sheets, and Exit Questionnaire.
4. Develop evaluation criteria for the research papers. Full time faculty will read and evaluate past research papers based on this criteria (research paper evaluation criteria attached).

Measurement and Assessment of Outcomes

1. Course syllabi—All faculty teaching in the HPIR department submit their course syllabi to be filed in the department office. The department chair will coordinate a process to review all syllabi each semester to insure that they include learning objectives and assignments that reflect department and discipline-specific objectives as outlined in the assessment plan.

The department is developing a document, “Guidelines for Teaching Courses in History, Politics and International Relations,” that will be distributed to all full and part-time faculty. The document provides guidance on course design, assignments, grading, and policies in an effort to communicate a shared sense of expectations without undermining academic freedom.

2. Course Evaluations—Students will evaluate all courses using a standard department evaluation instrument. The chair reviews all evaluations each semester to help evaluate the effectiveness of individual instructors, track the overall quality of teaching in the department, and identify weaknesses or problem areas. The department will conduct a review of the evaluation form to determine if it needs to be modified to better measure department goals and objectives.

3. Senior Overview—The senior overview is the primary and most comprehensive assessment tool of the HPIR department. Graduating seniors are required to read a scholarly book chosen by department faculty and pass an oral exam. To pass the exam students must show an ability to critically analyze and discuss the book with faculty. Students are graded on a scale of 1 to 5 on the following criteria: 1) knowledge and comprehension of the book's content, 2) understanding of the author's methodology, 3) clarification of both the author's and the student's values, 4) critical analysis of the author's arguments, and 5) synthesis of the overview book with relevant material drawn from coursework, personal experience or current events. The students are also judged on their communication skills. Students receive a grade of pass, fail or pass with distinction. A failing grade results in the student retaking the overview until they pass.

At the completion of the overview, faculty score sheets are collected and the data is compiled and analyzed. In addition to determining the percentage of students passing and failing the overview, average scores in each of the five criteria are tabulated. The data is circulated to all full-time faculty at an end of the year faculty retreat. The faculty discuss and analyze the data to assess student outcomes and determine the strengths and weaknesses of the department's curriculum.

Each overview student also fill out a "exit questionnaire" that asks them to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the department and to assess their own academic skills and preparation for the overview. A subcommittee of department faculty review the questionnaires, summarize the results, and present their report at the faculty retreat.

4. Research Requirement—Each HPIR major must write a research paper that meets the department standards outlined in the Research Paper Guidelines. A completed, graded paper is deposited in the student's file in the department office. At the end of each academic year the papers are removed from the files and randomly distributed to department faculty. The faculty review and evaluate the papers based on the nine criteria on the research paper evaluation sheet. Papers are scored according to whether they exceed expectations, meet expectations, or do not meet expectations. Individual score sheets are collected and percentages are calculated in each of the criteria to determine the proportion of students that meet or exceed expectations. At a faculty meeting at the beginning of the academic year faculty evaluate the results and discuss strategies to improve student performance.