

EWU Programmatic SLO Assessment

AY 2015-16 and “Closing the Loop” for AY 2014-15

Degree/Certificate: **Bachelor of Arts**
Major/Option: **International Affairs, all concentrations**
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Part I – Program SLO Assessment Report for 2015-16

Part I – for the 2015-16 academic year

1. Student Learning Outcome:

International Affairs Program, **Student Learning Outcome #4:**

Produce and present (in various forms) academically rigorous analysis of political, economic, and social events, structures, and/or processes located or occurring around the world (especially outside the U.S.)

2. Overall evaluation of progress on outcome: Indicate whether or not the SLO has been met, and if met, to what level.

- SLO is met after changes resulting from ongoing assessments, referencing assessment results from the previous year to highlight revisions;*
 SLO is met, but with changes forthcoming;
 SLO met without change required

3. Strategies and methods: Description of assessment method and choices, why they were used and how they were implemented.

The method of assessment was systematic analysis of all students’ Capstone research papers and presentations (including the paper proposals, draft papers, and final papers) submitted in the INST/GOVT 490 senior Capstone course of Fall 2015. Particular attention was given to instructor comments on those assignments, as well as to comments of the entire International Affairs Program faculty and the faculty of the Political Science Department in which the IA Program is housed and whose students also take the Capstone (it is a cross-listed course).

This method of assessment was used because it was used last year and provided good information. Using the same methodology seemed appropriate, although next year – when the other faculty member who usually teaches the course is back from her sabbatical—I would like to see comments on all papers throughout the year. The course is taught every quarter except summer.

The course is taught as a research seminar in which students write one significant research paper with a Political Science/International Affairs focus. Students may either choose to revise significantly a previous research paper they had written in another course in the major, or to write on a new topic. Seventy-five percent of the grade depends on students’ work on the paper, including submission of a “research summary”, a formal paper proposal, a draft of the paper, an in-class oral presentation of the paper, and the final paper. These assignments each are graded for accuracy, thoroughness, and clarity relative to the assigned elements.

This assessment report reviews all these materials, because only by reading students’ written essay-like work can one systematically assess students’ attainment of the learning outcome. The method also allowed analysis over

time of students' progress, as the assignments were sequential (they built on each other) and thus all required students to go through the same processes.

4. **Observations gathered from data:** Include findings and analyses based on the strategies and methods identified in item #3.

a. Findings:

Unlike the previous year, fewer students than expected drew from earlier research; most chose new topics. The ability to choose a topic varied significantly: some students found a topic easily, while others labored over the process. Regarding the SLO itself, most International Affairs students succeeded – and some students succeeded beyond expectations – in producing and presenting (orally and in writing) rigorous analysis of an international subject as described in the SLO.

As with last year's crop of students, students struggled with engaging with current debates in Political Science/International Affairs. Some of them believed that this meant finding online newspaper articles, when in fact it involves reading academic journal articles about the topic.

By the time of the final papers, most students had done two informal in-class presentations plus a formal presentation which was open to the public. (Peer feedback in class on these presentations was somewhat effective at helping them hone down the topic/research question/focus.) The remaining ten papers were generally good, with some variance in level of research depth, clarity of focus, and thoroughness of argument.

b. Analysis of findings:

Regarding selection of topics, IA students fared generally quite well, but it seems we need to have as one of our learning outcomes, "Identify a relevant and researchable topic in International Affairs."

Regarding the structure of the course itself, it seems Government/Political Science students struggled a bit more to find a topic (which again was not limited to the SLO but could have been a topic in American politics). This is relevant to the class itself, but it also indicates that the IA Program is succeeding in its goal of meeting this SLO.

I believe that another new SLO for our program may need to be, "Summarize accurately and converse with peer-reviewed scholarly literature on political/international affairs issues." This could be an SLO shared between IA and Political Science. In addition, it may be that because the course is cross-listed, Political Science and IA need to share some SLOs.

Next year – when the other faculty member who usually teaches the course is back from her sabbatical—I would like to see comments on all papers throughout the year.

5. **What program changes will be made based on the assessment results?**

There is only one major change to the course: In future, I plan to have students read just two or three draft papers in class. This will give them an idea of what other students are writing and what to improve in their own work.

As for changing the assessment process, one change should be made: a sampling of papers from throughout the year not just one quarter should be taken. This can be done through use of the database of student Capstone papers that is building through the POLI 493 "Portfolio Assessment" course, which all IA majors are required to take.

PART II – CLOSING THE LOOP
FOLLOW-UP FROM THE 2014-2015 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT

In response to the university's accrediting body, the [Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities](#), this section has been added. This should be viewed as a follow up to the previous year's findings. In other words, begin with findings from 2013-14, and then describe actions taken during 2014-15 to improve student learning, provide a brief summary of findings, and describe possible next steps.

PLEASE NOTE: The College-Level Synthesis report includes a section asking Deans to summarize which programs/certificates have demonstrated "closing-the-loop" assessments and findings based on the previous year's assessment report.

Working definition for closing the loop: *Using assessment results to improve student learning as well as pedagogical practices. This is an essential step in the continuous cycle of assessing student learning. It is the collaborative process through which programs use evidence of student learning to gauge the efficacy of collective educational practices, and to identify and implement strategies for improving student learning.* Adapted 8.21.13 from <http://www.hamline.edu/learning-outcomes/closing-loop.html>.

1. Student Learning Outcome(s) assessed for 2015-16

International Affairs Program, **Student Learning Outcome #4:**

Produce and present (in various forms) academically rigorous analysis of political, economic, and social events, structures, and/or processes located or occurring around the world (especially outside the U.S.).

2. Strategies implemented during 2015-16 to improve student learning, based on findings of the 2014-2015 assessment activities.

As compared to the results of the 2014-15 assessment, the 2015-16 results are improved. The strategies implemented are **bolded** in the following paragraphs:

- i. The Capstone course, on which the assessment was based, **now has an assigned textbook on research and writing** (Booth, Wayne C., Colomb, Gregory G., and Williams, Joseph M. (2008). *The Craft of Research* (Third edition). Chicago, University of Chicago Press.) This book has helped students formulate research questions out of research topics. It is finding the topic that is the bigger challenge now, and this indicates to me that the book has been helpful in formulating a research question.
- ii. This is not a change, but a continuation of past practice: **Students continued to be required to consult at least two EWU faculty whose expertise lies closer to their topic of study.** Several students reported that this helped them narrow their topics and lines of questioning.
- iii. This is not a change, but a continuation of past practice: **Students continued to be required to do "research pitches" and an informal overview of their formal presentations.** These continued to be useful for acquiring constructive feedback early in the research process.

- a) Provide a broad timeline of how and when identified changes will be addressed in the upcoming year.

Fall 2016: course taught in current format, with one major change: students will read just two or three draft papers in class

Winter 2017: course taught in format described

Spring 2017: course taught in format described, assessment of a statistically representative sampling of papers across the year may be done; otherwise, a pooling of that year's Capstone papers will be undertaken by the three different instructors of the course.

- iv. Description of revisions to the assessment process the results suggest are needed and an evaluation of the assessment plan/process itself.

Over the course of AY 2016-17, there should be assessment of a statistically representative sampling of papers across the year; otherwise, a pooling of that year's Capstone papers will be undertaken by the three different instructors of the course.

The major will not be drastically redesigned based on comparison of the **2014-15** and **2015-16** assessment results. In many ways, in fact, the results of this assessment indicate that International Affairs students are faring quite well in their ability to do this kind of research and writing and oral presentation.