

2016 General Education SLOA Summary

General Education Category: Political Science

A. Critically analyze and evaluate issues derived from the Social Sciences utilizing appropriate methodologies.

B. Demonstrate an understanding of how culture, society and diversity shape the role of the individual within society and human relations across cultures.

Semester: Spring 2016

Data Summary: see attached which includes the grading rubric, data from grading rubric for each student and an average for each of the five grading elements.

Discussion of Analysis Results:

The data indicates:

- Students are prompted to critically follow topics that are frequently unfamiliar to them. These topics include foreign relations, the environment, health care, and the economy.
- Students are responsible for regularly compiling information on political news topics, so they begin to more closely follow current events as they relate to political activity and processes. Students usually collect their data from Internet sources, which leads to a discussion of the relative value of different information sources on the Internet, and general attention to the subject of media literacy.
- Little media literacy was evident at the beginning of the course, but through the process of extensive discussion, students became aware of levels and directions of bias.
- While appreciation of racial, ethnic, and sexual diversity are essential, in this class we pay special attention to the importance of political diversity. One of the primary goals of the course is to develop an appreciation for open and honest political discussion that includes inherent respect for opposing points of view. In this term, when the discussion of the presidential primary season was the prime topic of the discussion, students practiced discussion skills that required them to respond to opposing points of view in a respectful and analytical manner.

Plan of Action (closing the loop):

The assignment that I use as a learning outcome assessment is useful because it fits easily within the context of the course, providing both a learning experience and an assessment tool. Because students are keeping a "news diary," they know that they are required to follow current events. We use discussion of current events as a key element of the course, demonstrating that the topic of politics is not a theoretical subject but is, in fact, a topic that affects the everyday lives of all of us, from the setting of speed limits, our taxes, and even which bathrooms may be used.

The news this term was dominated by the horse-race element of the 2016 presidential race, a fact that I recognized and attempted to use as a learning opportunity. For example, the contentious primary season meant that we all learned in considerable detail not only about the candidates running for office but also about the primary process itself. Among the topics we discussed how delegates were chosen, the ethical issues involved in delegate selection, the issues that were motivating the electorate, and the campaign finance system. As a whole, the presidential race added extra interest to the study of politics and I think it made the course as a whole more informative.

In the fall semester, I hope to use a structured debate assignment with the introductory politics course. I have used a debate assignment in the past mixed results. On one hand, the assignment gave students a chance to do independent research and allowed them to thoroughly investigate alternative viewpoints. On the other hand, I found that careful monitoring of the assignment was necessary because some students believed that they could easily free ride off the work being done by their classmates. I have not decided on a structure for this assignment, but I believe the general election provides a good context for some sort of debate assignment that could be used both as an assessment tool and as a valuable learning experience for the students.

Discussion of Rubric

The instrument used this year to assess the students in this General Education class was a news journal assignment. This assignment required that each student maintain a news journal throughout the term. The students chose one topic that related to national politics and then maintained a news journal throughout the term. Students were expected to read two news articles per week on the subjects that they had chosen and discuss these articles in journal entries.

Examples of subjects covered in student journals could be health care, drug laws, national defense, Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, or the economy. This journal is used as a subject for classroom discussion throughout the term, but the journal itself is not submitted until the end of the term.

At the end of the journal, students also include a summary of what they learned during the term by following this one subject through the past three months.

The journals and their summaries were assessed on the following criteria.

- A. Understanding of the issue being followed.
- B. Understanding political mechanisms and institutions relevant to issue followed.
- C. Communication of events and complex ideas.

D. Willingness to investigate and understand opposing points of view.

E. Comprehends the importance of diversity within US society and political system.

These elements in turn were assessed on a five-point scale.

Five (5): Excellent, demonstrates superior competency.

Four (4): Good, demonstrates above average competency.

Three (3): Average, demonstrates basic competency.

Two (2): Below average, demonstrates inadequate competency.

One (1): Demonstrates little to no competency.

Data from Grading Rubric

Spring 2016

POL101-01

12 students assessed

Average score: 20 out of 25

POL101-02

13 students assessed

Average total score: 23 out of 25

Discussion of Results

As noted above, the presidential race created an environment where students were more actively following and more interested in politics than usual. I was not satisfied with just following the topic as a horse race, however, and wherever possible I attempted to guide the discussion of the topics into an examination of the issues that lay behind this or that statement or position by a political candidate.