

EWU Programmatic SLO Assessment

AY 2014-15 and “Closing the Loop” for AY 2013-14

Degree/Certificate: **Bachelor of Arts**
Major/Option: **International Affairs, all concentrations**
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Part I – Program SLO Assessment Report for 2014-15

Part I – for the 2014-15 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 2014. 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 Government 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 this was the first time that the Capstone had been taught in the way it was, in an attempt to alter past problems with the course. Previously – since at least 2001 – the course had been taught with the theme of either “Global Governance” or “Globalization.” Unfortunately the Government majors, for whom this is also a required course, felt that this unfairly disadvantaged them relative to the International Affairs majors with whom they take the course. This is because Government majors seem to have come to view any internationally-focused (rather than United States-focused) course as “belonging” in International Affairs rather than Government/Political Science. This is a problem in the department because of course the field of Government/Political Science includes the field of International Relations and of Comparative Politics: both are traditional fields within Government/Political Science. Nonetheless, the challenges of teaching what had become a “captive audience” of Government majors alongside International Affairs majors, plus the challenge of encouraging students to write a truly in-depth, well researched Capstone paper during a mere 10 weeks’ time, encouraged Dr. Edquist to change the format of the course.

The SLO still applies to the IA majors, and IA majors are not usually allowed to focus on a U.S. topic, though Government/Political Science majors are allowed to do so.

The course format was changed to require a student to either rewrite a previous research paper done in another course, or to choose a new topic for the course. The topic was completely open so long as it pertained to Political Science or International Affairs. The assessed material included these submissions: the paper proposal, the draft paper, and the final paper. These materials were assessed for accuracy, thoroughness, and clarity relative to the assigned elements.

This method was selected because it is only through reading students' written essay-like work that one can do a systematic analysis of students' attainment of the 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.)**. 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:

Regardless of whether the students revised a previously written paper or started a new topic, all students needed help with deciding the core focus of their research. It is true that the paper proposals varied in quality based largely on whether the students had chosen a new topic (their proposals were not as well researched, although 10 sources were required) or were revising a paper (the research represented in those proposals was more relevant to the topics in question). But by the time of the draft paper, the quality of the work was generally equal and the research challenges became clear: students did not know how to hone down their topics to questions that engaged with current debates in Government/Political Science or International Affairs. While students understood the format of the paper proposals and the draft papers, it seemed students either did not know how to hone down their questions or lacked the confidence to do so.

By the time of the final papers, most students had done two informal in-class presentations, which helped them hone down their research questions, plus a formal presentation which was open to the public. (Peer feedback in class on these presentations was extremely effective at helping them hone down the topic/research question/focus.) The challenge with some final papers was simply that some students simply submitted what they had written in previous classes – in one case – or that the work was not as polished (thorough and clear) as it could have been (three papers). One student failed to turn in a draft paper or a final paper. 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:

This assessment pertains more to the entire International Affairs major and to the preparation it gives students for researching and writing. Students occasionally had a difficult time narrowing down their research topics: one student, for example, wanted to assess the entire fifteen-year implementation process of the eight globally implemented Millennium Development Goals. The student was encouraged to narrow down to the topic, but by the time she understood its utter breadth, the paper was still focused on too large a sub-topic. However, where possible, the

instructor encouraged students to work on a smaller case within the larger topic, and this proved more fruitful in most cases, where students had a) enough time to do the research on the case; and b) enough data to work with (some students chose their topics too late to gather that data very well). More important, the in-class comments on students' informal presentations of their work really helped them hone down their topics. Students had to do a two-minute "research pitch" and then an informal preview of their formal presentations. Both activities allowed other students to give them invaluable feedback that was more effective than instructor feedback, in some cases, probably because students are not used to hearing constructive criticism from their peers.

Faculty in the department (most of whom attended at least one set of presentations) agreed that the papers – and presentations – had built on good research. However, they noted that some students' work, such as three papers dealing with the right to privacy, could have been improved with faculty consultation. While it had been *recommended* that students consult other faculty aside from the course instructor about their topics, only a few had done so, and not persistently.

Over all, the experiment of having students revise a previous paper was deemed successful both in terms of the quality of the outcome and in terms of the need to give students more latitude in their development of a topic close to their interests. In this sense, the course served the purpose of being a true "Capstone" to students' work in the majors. Those who wished to delve further into a topic had the opportunity to do so. The quality of the papers was about as good as in previous classes, where the topic was limited to global governance/globalization. Faculty in the department and I as Director of the IA Program feel that even more important than the quality of the papers relative to prior courses is students' increased awareness of the process of research: students came out of the course with a stronger sense of the process of doing research and writing, and this will help them in future papers. It also is likely that this will help them increase their confidence: knowing that they are bound to get disillusioned with their project at some point in the process helps them identify that feeling as part of the process of writing rather than a personal failure.

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

- a) Describe plans to improve student learning based on assessment findings (e.g., course content, course sequencing, curriculum revision, learning environment or student advising).

The course will undergo two main changes in the next iteration: one, it will assign a textbook on research and writing. There are several in the market that are written for adults familiar with writing but needing guidance in the process. This will also help students formulate research questions out of research topics, which is still one of the biggest challenges in the course, even for students who decide to revise a research paper.

Two, students will be *required* as part of the paper proposal assignment to consult at least two EWU faculty whose expertise lies closer to their topic of study. This will help students learn to talk with professionals about a subject and to acculturate them to the process of working with experts in a field, which presumably they will be doing during their subsequent careers. It will also, presumably, help them narrow down their topics and lines of questioning for their research papers.

Students will still be required to do "research pitches" and an informal overview of their formal presentations. These were very useful for acquiring constructive feedback early in the research process. Students will also be given the

opportunity to write feedback on draft papers on Canvas, rather than in class (which ended up being rather confusing because of all the papers that needed review in a 2.5-hour period).

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

Spring 2015: new textbooks identified, assessed, and adopted; course taught in format described above

Winter 2016: course taught in format described

Spring 2016: course taught in format described, new assessments done by faculty in the Program and Department

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

The assessment process itself works quite well as it allows a window into students' research during at least three points in the course. In addition, faculty viewing of students' research presentations was very useful as an assessment tool. To the extent possible, and to the extent that faculty are available, their insights will be invited in the next class sessions (which occur every quarter).

PART II – CLOSING THE LOOP
FOLLOW-UP FROM THE 2013-14 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 2013-14

International Affairs Program, **Student Learning Outcome #2:**

Demonstrate mastery of and apply accurately key analytic concepts of the social sciences, to cases, states, and regions around the world. (For example, apply accurately the concept of "dependency" in international relations as it concerns relations between Europe or the United States and Latin American states.)

2. Strategies implemented during **2014-15** to improve student learning, based on findings of the **2013-14** assessment activities.

Examples of strategies/methods: embedded test questions in a course or courses, portfolios, in-class activities, standardized test scores, case studies, analysis of written projects, etc. Additional information could describe the use of rubrics, etc. as part of the assessment process.

As compared to the results of the 2013-14 assessment, which assessed students' work on case studies in a 300-level course, **this 2014-15 assessment** pertains more to the entire International Affairs major and to the preparation it gives students for researching and writing. While the case study format had proved very useful in 300-level courses (because it gives students a more coherent, smaller data set to work with), the case study format was only partially used in this course. Some students chose larger "cases", such as the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, which was still too large a topic. However, where possible, the instructor encouraged students to work on a smaller case within the larger topic, and this proved more fruitful in most cases, where students had a) enough time to do the research on the case; and b) enough data to work with (some students chose their topics too late to gather that data very well).

The concept of democratization did not come up in students' research this time. Therefore, no change was made regarding this item.

Students did not seem confused about the purpose of the assignment, as compared to the purpose of the case study assignments in GOVT 326. The theme for this course is “your work as an IA/Government major”, and thus the course has a readily coherent theme for the students. The change made was to give the course this theme and to remove the global governance/globalization theme.

The major will not be drastically redesigned based on comparison of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 assessment results. However, there will be ongoing discussions with the faculty of ways to get students prepared to write a longer version of shorter term papers they do in other courses in the major.