

# CALVIN COLLEGE

## POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

State of the Department Report, 2002-2003

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B. Our most recent assessment plan findings indicate that our graduates are, in general, meeting the goals we have set for our major program. (Assessment plan is attached as Appendix A.) Each and all of the 2002 Political Science graduates met our objectives for research methodology, oral communication, and written communication. 85% met our objective for service, and our objective for integration of political science and the Christian faith is not yet applicable (in that explicit coursework is not yet available to majors). Our clear failing concerns our objective for disciplinary content in specific content areas. Only 65% of our graduates answered correctly 70% of questions in four of five content areas. Our goal was 90%. Since this past Spring's administration was the first for this assessment test, we know that there may be a number of reasons for students not meeting our stated objectives. Some of the test questions may be faulty (some students reported this); some questions may not be properly tailored to the specific courses from which they were drawn; course design and course delivery may not be as closely tailored to our program objectives as they should be; and our program as a whole may not be reinforcing necessary content beyond the introductory course level. We will be studying the results of the test this Fall with an eye both toward test revision and toward course and program re-consideration.

As a supplement to our program assessment, we have this past year surveyed our graduates in Political Science from 1995-2001. In this survey we asked our recent graduates about their level of satisfaction with various aspects of our major program, particularly with those things we have identified as primary program objectives. (Appendix B provides a summary of the survey's findings.) Our graduates told us that the program objectives we have set are indeed "important" or "very important." They also told us that, with the exception of "skills in data analysis," our program has prepared them "adequately" or "very adequately" for the work they now do. (We instituted a research methods requirement—POLS 251—in Fall, 1999, so more recent graduates do feel better prepared in data analysis.) In addition, they provided for us a number of concrete suggestions for program improvement. We will be spending this coming year working through these survey results with an eye toward program improvement.

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B. Our most recent assessment plan findings indicate that our graduates are, in general, meeting the goals we have set for our major program. (Assessment plan is attached as Appendix A.) Each and all of the 2002 Political Science graduates met our objectives for research methodology, oral communication, and written communication. 86% met our objective for service, and our objective for integration of political science and the Christian faith is not yet applicable (in that explicit coursework will first be available to majors only this spring). Our objective as to knowledge of disciplinary content in specific content areas has required us to develop a “knowledge” test for our graduating seniors. In our first administration of the test (spring, 2002), only 65% of our graduates answered correctly 70% of questions in four of five content areas. Our goal is 90%. Since that first administration, we carefully analyzed the test results, rewrote a number of test questions, and re-examined our course content—both in required courses and in the curriculum as a whole—to insure that the test questions properly referenced that content. The result has been a more coherent approach to the presentation of our curriculum, and a much better performance on the assessment test. This spring 86% of our graduating seniors (who took the test—three did not) correctly answered 70% of the questions in four of the five content areas. Although we did not reach our goal this year, we came much closer, and (due to a smaller total number of test-takers) found that only two students came significantly short of a “pass.” A great source of encouragement is that 70% of the test-takers scored 70% or better in *all five* content areas.

As a supplement to our program assessment, we last year surveyed our graduates in Political Science from 1995-2001. In this survey we asked our recent graduates about their level of satisfaction with various aspects of our major program, particularly with those things we have identified as primary program objectives. After some deliberation regarding the survey’s findings we have worked to develop those aspects of our program which our graduates feel are “important” but were for them not provided in a fully satisfactory way. In addition to developing a plan for a fuller and more coherent DC Semester program, we have asked our alumni to volunteer as email contacts for current students seeking information about graduate school or career opportunities in a variety of fields. The response from our alumni has been very strong, and we are now able to make available for students a booklet of names and email addresses that they are welcome to contact.

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