Title of Project: Assessing the Core: Content Knowledge and Student Attitude Change in POLI 101 and POLI 201

Amount requested: $7300

Co-Investigators: Dr. Pamela Martin  Dr. Holley Tankersley  Dr. Min Ye

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Department: Department of Politics and Geography

Purpose: Grant to Assess Student Learning
ABSTRACT

Given the emphasis on assessment and our Core Curriculum goals at Coastal Carolina University and nationally, we propose to study student learning outcomes using a pre-test/post-test survey in two core and major requirement courses: Introduction to World Politics (POLI 101, Core Goal 5) and American National Government (POLI 201, Core Goal 6). Additionally, we will examine student attitude changes after taking one or both of these courses. This study will not only provide insights into whether our students are achieving and meeting the proposed student learning outcomes, but will also provide the type of important information about political attitudes that is necessary to inform policy outcomes. The dataset that results from the project will illustrate how well these core courses are meeting the objectives of the Core Curriculum; it will also demonstrate Coastal Carolina University student political attitudes both globally and locally, which will be useful information for the campus and our community. Our primary question of interest is as follows: Do these courses not only provide knowledge to students, but also significantly impact their civic engagement and attitudes both domestically and globally?
PROJECT LITERATURE REVIEW ON ASSESSMENT IN THE DISCIPLINE

Much of the literature in International Relations and American Government (two prominent subfields of Political Science) assesses the impact of institutions, norms, and ideas on voters and global citizens. However, one flaw in our own studies is the lack of knowledge of the impact of our classes and research on our students, not just in terms of student learning outcomes (SLOs), but also in terms of their political attitudes and their disposition to become civically engaged in their communities at the local, national, or global level. Constructivist scholars (e.g., Anthony Giddens 1991, Brent Steele 2007, Alexander Wendt 1999) have defined this problem as the subject-object “double hermeneutic,” meaning the study of politics can also affect its practice. It stands to reason, then, that the teaching of politics (the subject) might also affect the students outside the classroom (the object). This project will examine the impacts of teaching and learning on knowledge capture as well as student attitude change in order to determine whether these courses not only fulfill their intended outcomes (knowledge for learning), but also whether they have deeper consequences in terms of praxis, or student political activity, and attitude change.

In a recent survey by Deardorff and Folger (2005), 50% of U.S. Political Science departments are conducting some type of assessment program. While most programs surveyed by Ishiyama and Breuning (2008) noted an assessment of knowledge and theories in the discipline, few assessed the concepts of citizenship and ethics, values, or attitudes. As Golich (1998) notes, clear and profound assessment requires time and resources, and as Deardorff and Folger (2005) explain, most departments in their survey have opted for easy assessment plans that require less time and resources. In an effort to stimulate hypotheses on assessment outcomes other than the typical discipline knowledge and theory, we propose to study the deeper questions of civic engagement and attitudes as a consequence of these introductory classes. Such assessment will also shed light on the larger Core goals of the curriculum and provide insights into students’ public policy and foreign policy preferences (see also Eriksson and Sundelius 2005).

As previously stated, our research will investigate changes in student attitudes towards politics, civic participation, and citizenship. This is unique in the literature on political science education; indeed, relatively few studies of assessment or education in general examine attitudinal change. This is odd, considering the fact that political science has long included the study of “social capital”, or community resources generated by the shared values, attitudes, commitments and behaviors of individuals within the community (Dahl 1994). Social capital manifests itself in two ways. First, social capital creates individual feelings of trust and togetherness, producing positive attitudes about society and the impact that a single democratic (i.e., active, participating) citizen can have on a community (Almond and Verba 1963, Inglehart 1997, Putnam 1993). Second, social capital persuades individuals to participate in the community via civic, volunteer, charitable, and professional organizations (Almond and Verba 1963, Putnam 1993).

Finally, there have been a number of studies in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Political Science that point to the effectiveness of active learning, distance learning and technology, and simulations in the classroom (Lantis, et. al. 2000, Powner and Allendoerfer 2008, Wilson et. al. 2007, Oros 2007, Boyer et. al. 2006, among others). Given that our survey will identify students via class section and instructor (we will ask instructors to identify which methods they employ in class), we will be able to analyze not only SLOs, but also the impacts of these teaching and learning strategies on SLOs and attitude change. As our dataset grows, such evidence will provide significant insights into our impacts as scholar-teachers on our students, the campus, and the greater policy community.
### PROJECT DESCRIPTION WITH TIMELINE

Specific student learning outcomes being assessed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLI 101 – Introduction to World Politics</th>
<th>POLI 201 – American National Government</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Departmental Student Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Departmental Student Learning Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When students finish this course, they should be able to:</td>
<td>When students finish this course, they should be able to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate the ability to analyze differences among political systems</td>
<td>1. Demonstrate comprehension of the development and evolution of political foundations, institutions, and processes in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Apply knowledge of international societies and systems to analyze international political and economic institutions</td>
<td>2. Apply knowledge of American political processes and institutions to analyze political events and situations</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Curriculum Goal 5: Knowledge of the Cultures, Languages and Social Structures of Other Countries of the World</th>
<th>Core Curriculum Goal 6: Knowledge of the Structure and Development of the United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of the world</td>
<td>1. Demonstrate a basic knowledge of the cultural and political heritage of the United States and its importance in contemporary events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Speak and learn from the practice of another language and culture</td>
<td>2. Demonstrate an understanding of the basic frameworks of the United States government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Understand other world cultures and languages to foster diversity and global citizenship</td>
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### Description of Assessment, Data Analysis, and Anticipated Change:

The assessment of student learning outcomes and attitude change will be conducted using a survey administered in the standard pre-test/post-test evaluation format. One survey will be designed for students in POLI 101, while the other will be designed for students in POLI 201. We will randomly select 10 (out of approximately 18) POLI 101 sections and 10 (out of approximately 24) POLI 201 sections for the survey. In addition, we will randomly select 4 other 100 level sections outside of our department as the control group; these sections will be in related social science and/or humanities fields (e.g., history, sociology, psychology, philosophy). Previous studies using pre- and post-survey method usually report 50% or so valid paired pre- and post-survey (Huerta and Jozwiak 2008). Therefore, we expect to collect approximately 1,000 valid cases in our data set.

The surveys will include a total of 25 questions each: five basic demographic items, 10 content questions derived from our departmental assessment tool for each class, and 10 attitude questions derived from the Pew Research Center’s “Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes” (a sample survey is provided in Appendix A). Each content/attitude question is designed to investigate one aspect of the SLOs and students’ political attitudes. To rule out the possibility that students can memorize their previous answers, we will prepare two equivalent questions (or at least two different ways to address the same issue) for each content/attitude question. As a consequence, we will have two versions (“A” and “B”) of each survey. Half of the 24 sections (five POLI 101, five POLI 201, and two control sections) use version A as pre-survey and version B as post-survey, the rest uses version B for pre-survey and version a for post-survey.
We will use two major methods to assess POLI 101 and 201 with respect to our Core Curriculum goals and student attitude change. The first method is to simply compare the average values of each content/attitude question in pre- and post-survey using the technique of hypothesis testing with two sample means (Healey 2004). For instance, to examine whether POLI 101 students have a better ability to “identify comparative forms of governance around the world” (the first SLOs) after taking this course, we can compare the average score of the corresponding survey question for all POLI 101 students. A statistically significant higher post-survey average score is seen as positive evidence. The advantage of this method is relatively lower requirement for the dataset. The problem is that it tells nothing about the origin of the difference.

To offer a closer examination of the information, we use panel data analysis (i.e., a pooled cross-sectional time series regression) of those valid paired pre- and post-surveys (Gujarati 2003). This method has been widely used in the analysis of similar surveys. The advantage of panel data analysis is that it allows us to focus on the change of individual students. With a multivariate analysis, we can control for the influence from irrelevant factors (i.e., gender, age, major, etc.) in our assessment. In addition, the control group offers a comparison between students with and without training of political science curricula. Theoretically, the panel data gives us a chance to evaluate POLI 101 and 201 on each SLO and change of attitude on every dimension. In this sense, each SLO and every aspect of political attitude captured in our survey can be assessed as a dependent variable. For instance, to assess whether or not POLI 101/201 invokes more interests in political affairs (measured in a corresponding question) we can run the following multiple regression model:

\[
\text{Post-survey interest in politics} = \text{Pre-survey interest in politics} + \text{POLI101/ POLI201} + \text{Control group} + \text{year of study in college}
\]

**Timeline:**
We will distribute the pre-test survey early in the Spring 2009 semester, preferably during the first two weeks of classes. Surveys will be complete by the first week of February. Post-tests will be distributed by April 1 with a deadline of the last week of April. Data coding, regression analysis, and dissemination of written results will take place during summer 2009, to be completed by the first week of August 2009.

**Impact on Assessment Efforts:**
We believe that this project will have a unique impact on our departmental and university assessment efforts. First, we will be investigating two courses in two separate Core goals; this will help the Department of Politics & Geography to determine how well it is servicing both the Core and our own departmental goals. Second, given the large number of sections of POLI 101 and POLI 201 offered on our campus, our data set should be quite large, providing ample ability to draw statistically significant conclusions. Finally, while much of the SOTL literature discusses student learning and teaching strategies, and the political science literature surveys voter attitudes, the two literatures do not often overlap. Thus, we plan to review how our classes impact student learning and student attitude change.

It is also important to note that this proposal represents the second phase of a planned multi-part study of student learning outcomes and attitude change. We are currently conducting the first phase, which is identical to the proposal presented here; this work was funded by a SOTL grant and began in September 2008. We are being assisted in this work by Chris Mee and the Office of Institutional Research. This Assessment Grant will allow us to continue on with the second phase of our project so that we have a full panel of data to examine. We hope to seek future funding to complete another year of assessment at CCU before expanding the study to a national level.
## BUDGET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amt</th>
<th>Expenditure/Justification</th>
<th>Line-item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$5000</td>
<td>Research stipends: To provide monetary support for the investigators, as this project goes beyond the scope of normal professional duties. Stipends will be used to offset the costs of refraining from summer teaching.</td>
<td>$1000 for Dr. Pam Martin $2000 for Dr. Min Ye $2000 for Dr. Holley Tankersley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please note that Dr. Martin will have limited availability for this project, so her portion of the stipend is less than that of the other two investigators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$1750</td>
<td>Stata/SE 10 Educational Lab License</td>
<td>$1750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each of the investigators will need a copy of the Stata data analysis and statistical software. Stata has superior processing capabilities, particularly for panel data. Purchasing the Lab License provides access for up to 10 computers; it is the most cost effective way to provide multiple access to the data. Otherwise, the cost would be approximately $2600.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$550</td>
<td>Supplies:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>External hard drive to store data                                                      $250</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bubble sheets for assessment                                                            $200</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Storage boxes for hard copies of surveys                                               $100</td>
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<tr>
<td>$7300</td>
<td>Total Budget Request                                                                  $7300</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
References


Appendix A: A Sample Survey

POLI 201 PRE-TEST

(Note: contents in brackets are dimensions of the question and will not appear in real surveys.)

Course No. _______________ Section No. _______________. Last Name _______________.
First Name _______________. Student ID. _______________.

PART I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. What is your age group?
   a. 17 – 20
   b. 21 – 25
   c. 25 – 30
   d. 30 or over

3. Are you a:
   a. freshman
   b. sophomore
   c. junior
   d. senior

4. What is your race/ethnicity?
   a. African American
   b. Asian American/Pacific Islander
   c. White no-Hispanic
   d. Latino/Hispanic
   e. Other

5. How much did you read the newspaper or watch the (domestic or world) news?
   a. everyday
   b. a few days a week
   c. one day a week
   d. once in awhile with no regularity
   e. never

PART II: POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE

6. How much would you estimate you were interested in world politics using a 5-point scale from 1-“not interested at all” to 5-“extremely interested”?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5

7. Using the same 5-point scale, how would you estimate your interest in domestic politics?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. 5

8. What is the Bill of Rights?
   a. Another name for the Declaration of Independence.
   b. Guarantees of procedural and substantive rights added to the Constitution in 1791.
c. A significant part of The Articles of Confederation.
d. A significant part of the original Constitution of 1787.
e. Amendments added after the Civil War to end slavery and give them full rights of citizenship.

9. The U.S. has a system separate branches and (largely) separate powers of government. What is its purpose? [US Government]
   a. To place an internal check on the legislative branch.
   b. To divide the country into two levels of government so that no one has complete power.
   c. To check and balance the powers granted to the national government.
   d. To enhance the power of the national government.
   e. To enhance the powers of the state governments.

10. To be elected President in the general election, the winning candidate must have: [President]
    a. a majority of popular votes.
    b. a majority of electoral votes.
    c. a majority of popular votes and electoral votes.
    d. a majority of electoral votes and win a majority of states.

12. The federal courts have the power of judicial review. What is it? [Judicial System]
    a. The power to impeach and remove the President.
    b. The power to override a presidential veto.
    c. The power of the federal courts to declare a law of Congress or action of the President unconstitutional.
    d. The power to confirm presidential appointments to the judicial branch.
    e. The power to confirm all presidential appointments.

13. Single member districts and plurality voting rather than proportional representation help explain why the United States has a: [Electoral System]
    a. multiparty system.
    b. two-party system.
    c. unitary party system.
    d. dominant party system.
    e. none of the above

14. “Due process” refers to: [Civil Liberty]
    a. checks and balances.
    b. the procedures by which a bill becomes a law.
    c. the power of the President to veto proposed constitutional amendments.
    d. procedural rights of those accused of crimes.

15. The Declaration of Independence is the American founding document. It contains four self-evident truths. All of the following are among them EXCEPT: [History]
    a. human equality.
    b. unalienable, natural rights.
    c. redistribution of wealth to all citizens.
    d. government secures rights based on the consent of the governed.
    e. the people retain the right of revolution.
PART III: POLITICAL ATTITUDES

16. In general, would you describe your political view as: [Political Ideology]
   a. very conservative
   b. conservative
   c. moderate
   d. liberal
   e. very liberal

17. Your attitude towards the statement that “Our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed”: [Government Responsibility]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

18. Your attitude towards the statement that “It is best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs”: [US Foreign Policy]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

19. Do you think using military force against countries that may seriously threaten our country, but have not attacked us, can be: [US Foreign Policy]
   a. often justified
   b. sometimes justified
   c. rarely justified
   d. never justified
   e. don’t know

20. Your attitude towards the statement that “Freedom of speech should not extend to groups that are sympathetic to Neo-Nazis or other extremists”: [Civil Liberty]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

21. Your attitude towards the statement that “We should make every possible effort to improve the position of blacks and other minorities, even if it means giving them preferential treatment”: [Race]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

22. Your attitude towards the statement that “When something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful”: [Government Regulation]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

23. Your attitude towards the statement that “I feel it’s my duty as a citizen to always vote”: [Political Participation]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree
24. Your attitude towards the statement that “Business corporations make too much profit”: [Business and Labor]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree

25. Your attitude towards the statement that “There needs to be stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment”: [Environment]
   a. strongly agree
   b. somewhat agree
   c. neutral
   d. somewhat disagree
   e. strongly disagree