**Annual Departmental Assessment Report**

Department or Program: General Social Sciences

Academic Year of Report: 2018

Department Contact Person for Assessment: Reuben Zahler, Director

Brief Introduction to GSS

GSS is an interdisciplinary program that does not have any dedicated faculty or teach any courses. Rather, all of our curriculum comes from courses taught through other CAS departments and some professional schools (Business, Journalism, Design). GSS, therefore, does not control the syllabi or in-class experiences for our students.

GSS has four concentrations, or tracks, which function like four distinct majors. They are:

AEBS: Applied Economics, Business, and Society

CLS: Crime, Law, and Society

GEP: Globalization, Environment, and Policy

SST: Social Studies Teaching

Each track has a distinct curriculum and academic pedagogy, and consequently attracts distinct students. For assessment purposes, then, frequently we need to consider GSS as composing four different majors. The four tracks are:

**Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report**

We investigated the education our students receive through the following two assessment plans:

Assessment 1: How well does the GSS curriculum help the student to meet the following SLO’s:

* Enabled you to synthesize large amounts of information?
* Improved your problem-solving skills?
* Taught you to find solutions from a diversity of analytical skills?
* Helped you to understand how a person’s perspective can be different depending on gender, class, national origin, etc.?

Assessment 2: GSS students are not required to take 400-level courses, and the logistical hurdles to enforce such a requirement would be considerable. Nonetheless, there are numerous advantages to undergraduates who fulfill these high-level courses. Before deciding how to address this issue, we wanted to learn the following:

* How many GSS students take 400-level courses?
* How well prepared are they for that coursework? How do they perform compared to the wider UO student population?
* How important are completing pre-requisites to student success in a 400-level course?

**Section 2: Assessment Activities**

*Assessment 1: Do students meet overall GSS SLO’s?*

We used indirect measures for this assessment. At first, we considered whether to investigate whether students satisfy the SLO’s specific to their GSS concentration. We consulted with Dr. Lisa Mazzei (professor in the College of Ed, specializes in qualitative research methodology and curriculum theory). Professor Mazzei assured us that in order to assess technical skills gained through a major’s curriculum, we would need to use direct measures. Direct measures pose an obstacle for GSS because we do not administer any of the courses our students take. We opted instead to use indirect measures for this assessment. In winter-spring of 2017, with funding from the CAS deans and Provost offices, we hired we Jeanine Cunningham (Sociology GE) to conduct a survey of GSS students. We asked seniors a number of questions designed to assess how well the coursework matched the overall GSS SLO’s.

111 seniors participated in this survey. The results of some parts of the survey are:

Coursework and course experiences:

Had the following experiences in their coursework often or very often:

* worked in a small group: 72%
* completed an assignment that used an information source other than required readings: 71%
* completed a group project: 63%
* received feedback from an instructor that improved their use of information resources: 59%
* worked on a project that had multiple smaller assignments, such as outlines or rough drafts: 54%
* completed an assignment that used the library’s electronic collection of articles, books, and journals: 47%
* decided not to use an information source in a course assignment due to its questionable quality: 37%
* made a speech to a group: 33%

Exposure to diversity and a variety of perspectives

The majority (59% - 74%) of students said they had often or very often observed discussions about economic or social inequality; issues of race, ethnicity, or nationality; different political views; and issues of gender or sexual orientation.

A minority of students (38%) had often or very often seen discussions about religious or philosophical differences.

Approximately 66% had often or very often:

* worked in a group of people who differed from themselves in background, political orientation, or points of view
* participated in and observed a discussion or debate about an issue of social, political, or philosophical importance
* creatively thought about new ideas or ways to improve things
* critically evaluated multiple solutions to a problem
* discussed complex problems with others to develop a solution
* participated in and observed a discussion about the ethical consequences of a course of action.

Conclusions regarding GSS SLO’s

A clear majority of students report that they have met the overall GSS SLOs in terms of synthesizing large amounts of information and problem-solving skills, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, interdisciplinary thought, and exposure to multi-cultural perspectives.

Fewer students had exposure to the key skills gained through independent research, such as advanced use of library resources or rejecting a source because of its questionable quality. Only a third of students made a speech to a group, which is not a surprise, as CAS courses often do not require public presentations.

Regarding exposure to diversity and diverse perspectives, a clear majority engaged in discussions about diversity based on inherited traits such as race, gender, sexual orientation. However, less than 40% had exposure to discussion about non-inherited differences such as religious or philosophical differences. It is likely that coursework could include more attention to such ideological diversity.

**Assessment 2: When GSS students take 400-level courses, how do they perform?**

We used direct and indirect measures for this assessment. In the survey, we asked graduating seniors about their experience with 400-level courses. In addition, we collected quantitative data from Student Data Warehouse (SDW) and its successor, Operational Data Store (ODS). We used the data from SDW and ODS to determine how many GSS students have taken 400-level courses and how they have performed in them.

*Data from Data Warehouse:*

We looked at data on GSS from when the program reopened in winter 2011 through spring 2017. We wanted to consider only 400-level courses that are academic in nature and worth a minimum of 3 credits, and therefore excluded those courses with the following criteria:

* P\* courses
* 1 and 2 credit courses
* Internship credit (department code CPSY)
* Credits with the following department codes: SAPP, CAS

Colleges that offered the most 400-level courses taken by GSS students:

CAS: 49%

ED: 21%

DSN: 10%

Most popular courses

Notably, when we look at the individual 400-level courses most taken by GSS students, courses outside of CAS stand out. Of the top-10 400-level courses most taken by GSS students, seven are from the professional schools: 5 from ED, 1 from JO, 1 from LAW, and only three from CAS. In the top five most taken courses, none is from CAS.

Overall figures, from 2011W through 2017S, of completion of 400-level course

Total number of GSS students (including both current students and alumni): 2,207

GSS students that had completed a 400-level course: 1,668

Incidence (number of times GSS students have completed a 400-level course): 4,899

Number of 400-level courses taken, or distinct department and course numbers: 539

Summary: 76% of GSS students completed at least one 400-level student (= 1,668 ÷ 2,207), for an average of 2.9 courses/student (= 4,889 ÷ 1,668)

Breakdown of completion of 400-level courses by GSS Track

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Track** | **% students within track** | **% students that completed a 400-level course\*** | **% incidence\*** |
| AEBS | 61% | 61% | 51% |
| CLS | 25% | 24% | 31% |
| GEP | 9% | 9% | 11% |
| SST | 5% | 4% | 5% |

\* These data include 2-3% of students for whom Data Warehouse did not identify their concentration.

Summary: The likelihood that students will take a 400-level course does not depend on their track: The percentage of students within each track closely matches the percentage of students that take a 400-level course, broken down by track. On the other hand, in some tracks, students take more 400-level courses than other tracks. Students in AEBS comprise 61% of all GSS students, but take only 51% of all 400-level courses, meaning that on average AEBS students are less likely to take a 400-level course. Conversely students in the other tracks are more likely to take more 400-level courses per student, particularly those in the CLS track.

Comparison of Grades:

Here we see that students in the different tracks have roughly the same likelihood to earn an A or B in 400-level courses:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Track** | **% of GSS students who earned an A or B in classes in 400-level** |
| AEBS | 68% |
| CLS | 71% |
| GEP | 69% |
| SST | 72% |

The following figures show the % of GSS students who earned a grade of A/B or D/F, and how that figure differs (Diff) from non-GSS students who took those same courses. The figures are broken down by the college that offered the 400-level course.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **College** | **% A's and B's** | **Diff** | **% D's and F's** | **Diff** |
| AA | 79% | -3% | 2% | 0% |
| CAS | 60% | -13% | 6% | 2% |
| BA | 66% | -24% | 5% | 4% |
| ED | 78% | -12% | 5% | 3% |
| JO | 82% | -7% | 2% | 0% |
| LAW | 72% | -9% | 5% | 1% |
| MU | 82% | -8% | 3% | 1% |
| Overall | 69% | -10% | 5% | 2% |

Conclusions on performance in 400-level courses

The clear majority of GSS students take 400-level courses, even though they are not required to do so. Within those courses, 69% of GSS students earn a A/B while 5% earn D/F. Non-GSS students earn A/B with 10% higher frequency and earn D/F with 2% lower frequency. We assume that most UO students who take a 400-level course do so within their major, and thus are better prepared to succeed in those courses than are students from outside their major, such as GSS students. Therefore, we would expect non-GSS students to outperform GSS students in these courses, and the data bear out this expectation. Nonetheless, GSS students clearly perform respectably in these courses, and non-GSS students perform better at only a small to modest degree.

*Survey results:*

Of 111 seniors who took the survey, 73 (66%) said they had taken a 400-level course at the UO. The Data Warehouse data shows that 76% of GSS students take 400-level courses, so that the survey respondents somewhat under-represent this sub-group. The most common departments that they said they had taken these courses were: Sociology (11%), Geography (9%), History (9%), PPPM (9%), and Political Science (5%).

*Preparedness, and the value of pre-requisite coursework*

To investigate how prepared GSS students were, and how important pre-requisite coursework was, we combined the direct and indirect measures.

Courses with prerequisite coursework:

The survey found that, unsurprisingly, those students who fulfilled the pre-requisite felt more prepared than those who did not. However, students often felt adequately prepared even if they had not taken the pre-req.

The direct evidence (Data Warehouse data) supports the survey results. The statistics show that when students take courses with a pre-requisite, students who don’t take the pre-req perform approximately as well as students who pass the pre-req. On the other hand, students who fail the pre-req do worse that students who pass the pre-req. The value of the pre-req, therefore, seems to depend largely on the individual student: many students can succeed without the pre-req, whereas for some students their performance in the pre-req predicts how well they will do in the course.

Denice Gray from CAS looked closely at performance in two specific courses: PS468 and PS470:

“We see passing the prereq’s did help achieve a higher grade in the 400-level course, in general.  We also see non-GSS students getting a larger grade bump from passing the prereq than GSS majors did.  However, if students did not take the prereq’s, their grade was similar to those who passed the prereq.  The one exception to this is GSS majors who did not take prereq’s for PS470, but the number of students taking this path was only three, so I don’t believe we should read too much into this.”

No pre-requisite required:

Several of these 400-level courses did not have a pre-requisite. Did the students feel prepared for such a course? The survey answers were mixed, but for the most part students answered in the affirmative, that they felt prepared for 400-level coursework even though they had not gone through a pre-requisite course. Why or how did they feel prepared? They took these courses out of a personal interest in the subject matter. Some students reported that they had taken other courses related to that subject. Others reported that they had taken other courses that required similar workload, for instance other upper division coursework had prepared them for the heavy reading load, or daily writing exercises, or doing their own library research.

Some students reported that they were not prepared for the 400-level course. Why not? They did not anticipate the workload; had never taken a course from that department before and lacked the knowledge base and skills that the course demanded; the professor simply lectured through each class period, and they were so bored they couldn’t get engaged.

Conclusions regarding preparedness and the importance of pre-requisites

When students take 400-level courses, they do not do so randomly, but typically select courses for which they already have had preparation at the 300-level in terms of skills, workload, and subject matter. While some 400-level courses demand a specificity of skill-set such that a pre-requisite course is necessary, other 400-level courses are not so technically specific so that general upper division coursework can prepare the student. For the latter group, students can prepare themselves and succeed without going through a mandated pre-requisite.

These findings may help to explain why students in the AEBS track are somewhat less likely to take a 400-level course than in the other tracks. For AEBS students, the logical departments in which they would take 400-level courses are Economics and Business, both of which require considerable math and technical skills that build through a series of pre-requisite courses. Given that GSS students don’t necessarily built go through that preparatory coursework, there are fewer 400-level courses that would appeal to them than for students in other tracks. Further, the Business School often bars non-majors from taking their 400-level courses.

This report suggests that it would still be beneficial to require all GSS students to take a 400-level course, but that the need for such a requirement is not as strong as previously assumed. It is advantageous for all students to take a 400-level course, and expose themselves to that level of rigor. As mentioned earlier, requiring that GSS students do so presents daunting logistical obstacles, such as how to fund that many courses or how to require such courses without sacrificing the curricular flexibility that many students find appealing. The findings in this report alleviate some of the pressure to require these top-level undergraduate courses: some three-fourths of GSS students take these courses without being required to do so. On the other hand, many of those courses are outside the major and CAS, and may have little pedagogical relationship to GSS. To establish a requirement that students take a GSS-themed 400-level course is still a valuable aspiration. The data also suggest that, if we required 400-level courses that did not demand high-level skills associated with a particular major, that students can succeed without first taking a prerequisite class.

**Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis**

Because GSS does not offer courses or control their content, the program has a limited impact on the in-class experience. Nonetheless, we have cultivated good relations with our affiliated departments and can communicate our findings with them. We intend to continue examining the data from the 2017 survey to identify the following:

* Breakdown GSS track the responses to the SLOs. Each track has a distinct curriculum and functions as a distinct major. Therefore, it will be beneficial to learn if different tracks show more or less adherence to the SLOs.
* Share the data in this report with our affiliated departments (EC, PS, Soc, Geog, Hist, BA, ED).

**Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience**

Briefly describe other continuous improvement efforts that are not directly related to the learning goals above. In other words, what activity has the department engaged in to improve the student educational experience? This might include changes such as curriculum revisions, new advising approaches, revised or new co-curricular activities, etc. Describe the rationale for the change(s) and any outcomes resulting from the change(s).

Advising

GSS carries a large advising load: GSS advisors manage roughly 1000 students with just 1.6 FTE of advising, or 625 students/advisor. We add 500 majors/year and graduate 500 majors/year.

Our advising load is in fact heavier than those raw figures would suggest, because we seek to offer advising that is not only proscriptive but also holistic and exploratory. Consequently, many students find this advising so rewarding that they return numerous times. Indeed, at this point we get students from other departments that come to us for advising.

We require each new student to have an intake interview before they can join the major. This intake interview serves to assess in a holistic manner how they are doing in college, whether they have problems that will impede graduation, and to help the students begin thinking about their future career. Many of these students are starved for advising, and the intake interview results in numerous repeat visits. A number of our improvements, therefore, revolve around advising, and managing this load.

* Developed new advising approaches: advisors have continued to increase their training and professional development; created an integrated academic and career advising model to provide the tools needed for a meaningful life action plan (acronym for this structured system is LEAP: Learn, Explore, Assess, Plan).
* Integrated the SSC platform (Student Success Collaborative) in order to improve our note-taking and online advising schedule calendar.
* Developed a triage system to manage the numerous students who arrive for drop-in hours.

Curricular changes

* We added a required methods course to the curriculum of each of the four tracks. The course introduces students to a range of social science methods so that they gain a sense of the types of questions that scholars ask and the tools they use to address those questions. These skills not only help students understand the social sciences more broadly, but also give them skills that can be useful in the rest of the college coursework. Students can fulfill this requirement by taking one of three courses: PS 102 (Thinking Like a Political Scientist); Geog 391 (Social Science Inquiry and Research); Soc 311 (Introduction to Social Research).
* Ongoing maintenance of the curricula of the four separate tracks: adding courses to the curricula; dropping courses that no longer fit.
* Double-dipping: Originally, GSS did not allow any double-dipping between other majors or minors. We now allow students to double dip three courses with another major and one course with a minor.

Additional career training

* Career development workshops (run on weekends), done in collaboration with advisors from EC and Geography

Working with prisoner education through the Inside-Out Program

* For several years, inmates in Oregon’s state and federal penitentiaries have gained college credit through the UO’s Inside-Out program. Inside-Out and GSS now collaborate so that inmates can graduate from the UO with a major in GSS. In 2018S, for the first time, UO granted bachelors, with majors in GSS, to two inmates. At the same time, the UO also grated bachelors degrees to inmates in the Humanities majors.

**Section 5: Plans for Next Year**

Briefly describe tentative assessment plans for the next academic year. Which goals will be assessed and how? What actions will be taken as a result of this years’ analysis of assessment information? What other plans does the department have to improve the student educational experience? What are the budgetary implications of any proposed actions? How will those be addressed?

While GSS appreciates the value of a forward-looking strategy for next year, at this time devising such a plan seems unrealistic. By 2019F, we expect that the two GSS staff people will be removed from GSS and placed full time in the new Tykeson College and Career building. We do not know into what sort of positions they will move or what their status will be, and we don’t know if they will still have any affiliation with GSS. The current GSS director, who has held the position since GSS was resurrected in 2010F, will step down at the end of his current contract, in 2019U. We do not yet know who will be the new director or what their plans will be. Given that none of the current GSS personnel will remain, we cannot make plans for the next academic year.