

Assessment Plan for General Social Sciences
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The interdisciplinary General Social Sciences Program (GSS) has proven to be surprisingly successful in terms of attracting majors. Within five years of its launch (Jan 2011-Oct 2016), GSS had approximately 900 majors and had graduated another 1,245 majors, making it one of the largest majors on UO campus. GSS proposes to engage in a two-part study that would use direct and indirect methods to assess the following:

- How well do graduating GSS seniors meet our Student Learning Outcomes?
- How well qualified are GSS seniors to succeed in a 400-level course?

Background on the issue of 400-level courses

One of the weaknesses of the GSS curriculum is that it does not require students to complete any 400-level coursework. The curriculum offers these courses, but does not require students to take them. GSS is not alone in this regard. Neither of the two other CAS divisional interdisciplinary programs, General Science and Humanities, requires their majors to fulfill 400-level coursework. While majors such as History, Political Science, Economics, and Sociology require 400-level coursework, Geography requires only 2-credits at this level. The UO does not require 400-level coursework to award a degree, so these programs' curricula do not violate any university rules.

The benefits of taking 400-level courses are numerous. Such courses bring students to a greater depth of disciplinary inquiry and methods, and thus train students in higher levels of evidence gathering, analysis, and communication. Many of these courses require independent research, and thus require students to learn high-level skills of problem solving, organization, and self-motivation.

The complications posed by requiring these course are also numerous. GSS does not have any dedicated courses or faculty, so we are entirely dependent on other departments to instruct our students. Many GSS students don't take a series of skills-building courses within a particular discipline, and therefore their performance in a 400-level course may be poor. If we require students to take a series of preparatory courses, we will reduce the curricular flexibility that has made the program so appealing for some students. Also, we will need enough 400-level courses to accommodate all those GSS majors. How will the College fund that many upper-division, small enrollment courses? Which departments will be willing to take on the additional teaching load?

Before tackling those logistical questions, GSS proposes that we assess how well qualified our students are to take 400-level courses? Does the curriculum already make them qualified? If not, what additional skills do they need? If we consider completion of 400-level coursework to be a valuable accomplishment in a college education, how well do GSS students fit that criterion?

Assessment methods:

Direct measures to assess the issue of 400-level coursework preparedness:

Access the transcripts of GSS seniors to pursue the following questions:

- How many GSS students have taken 400-level courses? In which disciplines do they tend to take those courses?
- How did the GSS students perform in those courses, compared to students from other majors?
- Did those 400-level courses have prerequisites? Did taking prerequisites improve a student's performance?

Indirect measures to assess both 400-level and general educational preparedness:

If granted funding by the deans' office, we will develop and administer a survey for graduating seniors. The survey will address broad issues about the quality of the GSS education as well as issues specific to 400-level course competency.

Questions for all GSS seniors: The survey will also ask all seniors to assess whether GSS provided the skills and knowledge base that we assume it does in our Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Essentially we will turn our SLOs into survey questions. For instance, we will ask, "Has GSS coursework"

- 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.?

We will also have questions specific to students in each of the four GSS concentrations. For instance, for students in the Applied Economics, Business, and Society track, we would ask, "Has GSS coursework given you"

- Basic knowledge of microeconomics and macroeconomics?
- Familiarity with how Business Administration uses accounting?
- An understanding of how to use mathematical statistics in a business and/or economic setting?

Questions for seniors who took a 400-level course will include:

- Did you feel prepared for the course?
- If yes, what previous coursework or experience gave you the skills and knowledge to succeed in the course?
- If you did not feel prepared, why not?
- What skills or knowledge would have helped you succeed?

GSS has already begun a survey of all our students, to determine why they joined the major and how well the program is meeting their needs. With support from the Provost/Deans office, we hope simultaneously to survey our graduating seniors to see how well GSS meets our SLO's and how prepared these students are to complete 400-level coursework.