

## AY19 Program Learning Outcome (PLO) Assessment: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ECONOMICS

**Assessment Type:** Academic Program

**Year/Term:** AY19

**Level:** POLS 350

**Learning Outcome:** Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

**Assessment Method/Tool:** Program Civic Engagement Rubric

**Measurement Scale:** 3-1

**Sample Size:** 4

	Proficient (# of students)		Adequate (# of students)		Developing (# of students)	
Purposefully reflects on and applies skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom to settings in the public sector.	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Synthesizes multiple viewpoints and reflects on changes in personal attitudes and beliefs.	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Demonstrates an ability to listen, communicate, and act in inclusive ways within a civic discourse community.	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%
Demonstrates a consistent readiness for civic engagement via participation in campus and community-based groups.	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Means</b>		100%		0%		0%
<b>% scoring 2 or 3</b>						<b>100%</b>
<b>Benchmark:</b>	<b>100%</b>	Institutional benchmark median percentage of students meeting "Proficient" or "Adequate" levels				
<b>Median % Achieving Benchmark:</b>	<b>100%</b>	percentage of students meeting "Adequate" or "Proficient" levels				

## Closing the Loop Statement

### 1) Summary

The Politics and Economics program at EOU has long been the standard bearer with regard to inculcating students with the knowledge and skills necessary for lifelong civic engagement in their communities. The assignment for POLS 350 required students to collectively research an issue of community concern via development of research skills, utilizing multiple internet sources, developing a unique policy proposal to alleviate the issue, and finally, requesting policy action via presentation of a policy proposal and related written materials through public testimony to a local government agency. The results of this important learning activity were assessed via multiple activities (development of annotated bibliography, isolation of public policy “best practices,” generation of one-page policy memorandum, organization of policy packet materials, etc.) in tandem with a Canvas Discussion Board activity in which students were required to reflect on what they had learned from this important learning activity, along with how they would utilize the knowledge and skills gleaned from the assignment in the future. The strength of the assignment can be attributed to the instructor’s commitment to this learning outcome (he is presented multiple times at national conferences on the subject), along with assignment design, which included (1) small group brainstorming discussions, (2) weekly group meetings in which members shared their research and policy ideas, along with proposed policy change, which was then honed via regular interactive communication and polishing of public testimony via rehearsal, (3) requirement of integrating internet sources, especially “best practices” into the assignment, increasing student information literacy. The assignment was graded, with part of each student’s grade determined via peer review, which enhanced accountability to the group throughout the process.

While the assignment provided a unique, interactive learning experience in “the real world,” one of the (mostly) unintended consequences of the learning activity was revealed in the public testimony aspect of the assignment, and highlighted in student post-reflection Discussion Board assignments. The student choice of public policy, a La Grande Snow Removal Policy, was, given the weather, both needed and timely. The students proposed a major revision of the policy, including (1) communication of whether the streets would be plowed, from the current message on the radio by 6am (which the City admitted they were not following) to leveraging social-media based technology in partnership with Union County, who agreed to allow La Grande to “free ride” on the service at no charge; (2) standardize snow measurement protocols to include Public Works Director (or designee) to measure snow levels (6 inches or more accumulation trigger snow removal); (3) revision of snow removal route map, as the “old” map (the policy has not been reviewed for 10 years) predates the new Central Elementary School; and (4) highlight the need for regular evaluation of the policy. After much deliberation, several potential action items, including privatization of snow removal services, were not included in the final policy proposal.

Considering the amount of time and detail the students invested in the project, it was frustrating to “the team” (given employer preference for students having the ability to work in teams, as a major outcome of the project) that apparently there was very little desire on the part of City Council and City Manager to even address this time-sensitive problem. After a very professional presentation (scripted remarks, distribution on one-page policy memorandum--a huge and very marketable skill), desire to engage the City Council in questions about the details of the policy proposal, students picked up the attitude that the City Council didn’t care, and moreover the City

Manager didn't like students "getting in his business." This was demonstrated by the following student remarks generated as part of a self-evaluation of the group's performance on a Canvas Discussion Board assignment.

#### Student #1

The primary lessons I have learned that has changed my perspective on public policy is the *lack of initiative* office holders have. Before I thought that these people were in these positions to make things happen and to better the place they were representing, come to find out this isn't always the case. Office holders want the work done for them and want to take the credit for it. This lesson came as a surprise to me because it explained why often times these boards don't accomplish much.

#### Student #2

The *lack of initiative* that office holders have was very apparent over the course of this term. I was also surprised on how office holders seemed to want the work done for them only for them to take all the credit. When looking at how unprofessionally ran the city council meeting for the City of La Grande was it came at quite a surprise to me as well.

#### Student #3

Had I known there were going to be so few questions asked, I could have used the opportunity to expand off of one question in order to bring attention to another issue, which could have then led to more questions and helped get my fellow classmates involved in the meeting more. My overall understanding of the public policy process has increased incredibly and has served as a reminder that it is important to never give up, *even if it seems like the people that should care don't*.

### **Action Plan**

There is no need for an Action Plan for Civic Engagement in POLS 350. The multi-faceted nature of the assignment, in tandem with the group ethos/team building aspect, mark this as an important learning activity for Politics and Economics students. While not part of an Action Plan, per se, given the "attitude" of the City Council and City Manager, I might nudge future iterations of the class to provide testimony to another public agency (Union County Board of Commissioners). Assessment of other courses in which these skills are further developed (POLS 101, American National Government, POLS 314, State and Local Government, POLS 450 Applied Policy Analysis) is outside the confines of this report.

I will forward a copy of this report via email to all program faculty.

### **AY20 Civic Engagement Improvement Plan Recommendation (Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Quality)**

POLS's approach to Civic Engagement for General Education should be used as a model for all programs in terms of effective and thorough assignment design and sequencing of steps, with a thorough, clear, insightful analysis of results, indicating how the General Education Civic Engagement outcome aligns well with the program's Civic Engagement outcome.

The AY20 POLS Civic Engagement Improvement Plan should focus on the suggestions offered in the analysis above. One is the incorporation of opportunities to address other local public agencies, perhaps with less frustrating results. In addition, the program might consider how to prepare students for the frustrations that too often are shown in the the lack of interest in well thought out proposals, both in the private and public sectors. It can be frustrating and unrewarding work, so a frank discussion of that and how a professional responds to that psychological burden might be in order so that grit can be an additional “soft skill” to add to the impressive array of skills students developed in this POLS 350 project. The AY20 CE Improvement Plan should report on the results of these efforts and provide data on a course where the improvements have been operationalized.