I. Past Year Activity

A. Progress in Meeting Annual Goals.

Our goals for 2012-13 are listed below with notes on what we accomplished on each.

- To Revitalize the Department’s Web page: we worked with a former student to put together an updated web page. I am working on the final edits for this and hope to have it posted by sometime in June.
- We are still considering the revision of our Minor, but it is likely to include a specific requirement for a minimum number of courses at the 300-400 level.
- At our departmental retreat in January, we discussed additional learning outcomes and are finalizing an outcome related to research methods proficiency (as we have now added a methods requirement to our major).
- We are currently compiling data on our majors retention and graduation, and will also be constructing an alumni survey next year.

B. Progress with Strategic Planning.

We ado not have a formal strategic plan at this time, but now that we have revised our major, and also had our two junior colleagues promoted and tenured, we are looking toward the delineation of a strategic vision as one of our goals for 2013-14.

C. Administrative Changes.

Aside from the budget recissions that everyone faced, we had no major budgetary changes. We do regret that the reduction in part time funds has made us unable to rehire our long time adjunct John Woodcock to teach State and Local Government (which he has done regularly to full classes and strong reviews). On the facilities side, we will be moving to Social Sciences Hall in the next few months.

In terms of staffing, we are very proud that our colleagues Diana Cohen and Robbin Smith will now be tenured Associate Professors, and we salute their accomplishments.

D. Special Initiatives.

No major special initiatives at this time beyond our normal contributions.

E. Significant Accomplishments.
We sponsored or cosponsored a number of important talks and panels on public issues this year, including the following:

- Constitution Day panel on Voting, The Constitution and Democracy
- 2 panels (Fall and Spring) on the outlook for a second Obama term
- A talk by Rami Khouri on the Arab Spring
- A talk on the future of the Euro currency.
- A panel on the 30th Anniversary of Connecticut’s Lemon Law.

F. Assessment.

Our 2011-2012 Assessment Report is appended.

II. Planning for 2013-2014

A. Goals

Our goals for 2013-14 are the following:

- Drafting and approval of a departmental Strategic Plan and Vision.
- Finalizing revisions on our Minor.
- Deciding on the future of our current Public Administration specialization.
- Establishing more regular faculty/student discussion opportunities.
- Further development of our research methods expectations for majors.

B. Collaboration.

We have no definite collaborative plans at this time, although we anticipate we will be working with the Community Engagement Committee on projects of mutual interest.

C. Needs.

While do not have any immediate needs for additional staffing per se, we do believe that our secretary, Stephanie Waldman (who we share with Anthropology) is deserving of and should be supported for a promotion to Administrative Assistant. We value her work and contributions highly and feel she is as deserving of promotion as our faculty colleagues.

We also hope that budgetary conditions will improve sufficiently in the future to allow us to once again utilize John Woodcock as an adjunct instructor.

Assessment Report, Department of Political Science(2011-12)

PREAMBLE

The Department of Political Science sees its mission as one that looks both inward and outward. We strive to build, amongst our majors, minors and those other students who take our classes, a broad foundational understanding of the principles of our discipline. For our majors, this will include a knowledge base in the areas of American government, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, and public law/public administration. As of Fall 2012, we are also adding a research methods requirement. Our orientation in building this academic understanding is towards the larger communities of which we are all a part. We seek to prepare students for informed and responsible citizenship and civic engagement; to provide them with the tools and training necessary to become productive professionals in public or private service; and to ensure their ability to effectively adapt to and participate in a rapidly changing world.

SECTION 1-Learning Outcomes

The Department’s current Learning Outcomes are as follows:

1. Demonstrate basic understanding of the structure and dynamics of American government.
2. Explain the nature of, and relationships between, political institutions, processes, public policies, and ideas.
3. Compare and contrast political institutions and phenomena from multiple nations.
4. Critique or defend, by way of structured argument, political institutions, policies or processes, against a set of values or analytic standards.
5. Apply their knowledge of, and analytic skills in, the discipline to actual political environments or professional career positions.

SECTION 2 – Evaluation Findings

In 2011-2012, the Department’s assessment activities focused primarily on Outcomes #1-3, with some limited attention to #4 and #5. Outcome #1 was examined through tests in PS 110 (American Government And Politics) (125 students), as well as simulations in PS 431 (legislative Process) (20 students). Outcomes #2 and 3 were examined using in class exams and essay assignments (analytic prompts) in 4 sections of our introductory World Politics class (PS 104) and 4 of our upper level courses in Political Theory (Ancient And Medieval Political Thought, Modern Political Thought, American Political Thought, and 20th Century Political Thought) (65 students total), as well as data from PS 110 and PS 431 mentioned above. The findings were as follows:
**Outcome #1**: Demonstrate basic understanding of the structure and dynamics of American government. Measured using tests and simulations in PS 110 (American Government And Politics) and PS 431 (Legislative Process).

Failed To meet Expectations: 25%
Met Expectations: 60%
Exceeded Expectations: 15%

General Strengths: Willingness to consider multiple arguments and perspectives on political dynamics.

Needing Improvement: specific knowledge of political structures (particularly among students in PS 110).

**Outcome #2**: Explain the nature of, and relationships between, political institutions, processes, public policies, and ideas. Measured using a series of course exams (both objective and essay), as well as simulation in PS 431, in PS 110 (125 students), 232, 334, 335, and 433 (65 students overall).

Failed To Meet Expectations: 15%
Met Expectations: 65%
Exceeded Expectations: 20%

General Strengths: basic descriptions of ideas and political dynamics.

Needing Improvement: ability to compare and contrast ideas and processes.

**Outcome #3**: Compare and contrast political institutions and phenomena from multiple nations. Measured using series of in class exams, primarily in PS 104 (World’s Political Systems) (87 students).

Failed To Meet Expectations: 15%
Met Expectations: 65%
Exceeded Expectations: 20%

General Strengths: Good ability to engage with contemporary issues.

Needing Improvement: ability to do detailed comparisons and thoroughly explain them.

**Outcome #4**: Critique or defend, by way of structured argument, political institutions, policies or processes, against a set of values or analytic standards.

While we did not directly evaluate this outcome, anecdotal evidence from some of our upper level classes indicates that our students are reasonably good in basic argumentation, but need work on their
research methods skills to support this outcome. This is part of the reason we have now instituted a Research Methods class (PS 250) as a major requirement.

**Outcome #5**: Apply their knowledge of, and analytic skills in, the discipline to actual political environments or professional career positions.

While we did not “formally” measure this outcome in 2011-12, we do collect regular data each year on our interns in the Legislature and various other political offices. Feedback from intern supervisors indicates that our students continue to perform well and are highly engaged in the political process, which is the core goal of this outcome.

SECTION 3 – ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

In general, we find that most of our students (80%) tend to either meet or exceed our expectations on outcomes #1-3; this pattern seems to be holding over the last couple of years. Where we have found once again that they seem to need some improvement is in the areas of depth and detail. Though it does not come out specifically in the findings above, we also believe that we need to build up a stronger culture of professionalism in the discipline (ie research skills, literature reviews, etc.).

While one of our goals for 2011-2012 had been to further redefine these 5 outcomes to more clearly align them with all of our courses, we found ourselves more occupied with a necessary foundational step to that goal: redefining the curriculum of our major. We passed through the Curriculum process a revised major, which raised our required credits from 36 to 39, added a required Research Methods class, added a more explicit minimum up 300-400 level credits (18), an added a mini-specialization requirement (6 credits) in addition to our Area requirements. This revision is effective Fall 2012, and we believe it will help better achieve and clarify our learning outcomes. We will be revisiting our outcomes during 2012-13.

We also continue to be happy with the impact of our formal internship seminar (PS 485) on student learning, and will be reporting detailed data on this in our 2012-13 report.

SECTION 4 : USE FOR CURRICULAR ADJUSTMENTS

Based on the findings noted above, we are making a number of curricular adjustments in specific classes. We are putting more stress on student study skills and habits in our introductory classes, in order to improve their mastery of specific structures and detailed comparison that relates to outcomes 1 and 3. We have tailored more of our essay assignments to address not simply factual understanding, but an explication of relationships and processes that demand a demonstration of conceptual understanding (which is often where our students face more difficulty). We are also emphasizing more in class compare and contrast discussions where appropriate, to build on those abilities that relate to outcomes 2 and 3. We have created a Research Methods class (PS 250) to address our concerns with general student skills in the discipline.
The results above will also be part of our discussions at a departmental retreat on assessment that we are planning for January 2013. We will revise our outcomes if necessary, reexamine our methods for achieving these outcomes, and formalize our timelines for how and where we measure the outcomes.

SECTION 5 – GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

Measuring General Education outcomes in Civic Responsibility and Global Awareness has been one of the most challenging parts of our work, not because we do not have plenty of evidence on these areas, but because our measures have not yet been specifically re-tailored to addressing them specifically. That being said, we believe that our Outcome 3 measures our students’ global awareness, and our Outcome 5 very definitely addresses Civic Responsibility. Based on this connection, we believe that our Outcome 3 demonstrates that the large majority of our students (80%, measured in 2011-12 in PS 104 primarily) demonstrate a strong foundation in global awareness (and this does not include our strong array of upper level comparative politics classes). Our findings from our interns also demonstrate a strong mastery of civic skills, which we are also trying to work into some of our appropriate non-intern classes.

For 2012-13, we are developing a direct focus on measuring these 2 Gen Ed outcomes, and will report on them in our 2012-13 report.

SECTION 6 – ASSESSMENT PLAN

We will be meeting this year to define a specific assessment plan. While we have a strong culture of individual assessment in our department, our crucial next step is building those pieces into a clearer and more explicit collective culture of assessment, including regular collective reporting. We use rubrics and detailed standards, but have not always framed or connected them in all cases to our collective outcomes. We look forward to presenting a full and detailed plan in our next Report.