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REPORT

Assessing the achievement of the Critical Thinking general education outcomes in POLS Y490

Purpose

In the Spring of 2014, I conducted a study on two sections of POLS Y490 Senior Seminar in Political Science. This consisted of a total of seven (7) students; four (4) from Spring 2014 POLS Y490 and three (3) from Spring 2013 Y490.

Method

The Critical Thinking Rubric, as adopted by Academic Affairs, was used to assess the final research paper of seven (7) students in POLS Y490. POLS Y490 is taught as an independent study; it is meant to engage the student in the research process by requiring the student to develop a thesis, assess the literature, identify relevant data, and formulate analysis. Both political science professors at IUN (Eisenstein and Poulard) read the seven (7) final papers and scored them from four (4 – highest) and one (1 – lowest); these scores correspond to the Critical Thinking rubric (attached below).

Quality of Critical Thinking	Points
Highly Proficient Work	4
Proficient Work	3
Partially Proficient Work	2
Not Proficient Work	1

Findings for POLS Y490

Assessment Data	Points			
Papers	4	3	2	1
#1	x			
#2	x			
#3			x	
#4	x			
#5			x	
#6	x			
#7		x		
Average Score Across All Papers: 3.29/4.00				

Analysis and Plan for POLS Y490

The results for POLS Y490 are highly commendable. Four of the papers are categorized as a “4”; one paper is categorized as a “3” while two are categorized as a “2”. Thus, our average score across all papers is 3.29 / 4.00. In general, we are pleased with the level of analysis represented by 5 out of the 7 papers and we are equally satisfied that all papers were, at a minimum, acceptable. The results also reflect the iterative process used throughout the semester. Students are required to submit several drafts and receive feedback along the way. Thus, the final product benefits from having been reviewed multiple times and from students making needed and necessary corrections and adjustments.

One way to understand this analysis is to look at the fact that over 50% of all the students completing the BA degree in political science are at the very top of the rubric, i.e. they are “highly proficient students.”

These students are known to:

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought or beliefs, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Now on top of all this, additionally, one student’s paper was ranked as a three, just below the above students. That is remarkable for a graduating group of students. It must necessarily be added that all the evaluations, although ultimately subjective, were performed by faculty members who are known for very strict standards in their evaluation of students. It is not any different here.

None of this means that there is not work to be done in the future with students so that the overall evaluation may improve. But, the political science students at IUN have performed remarkably well and should be so commended.

APPENDIX

Form used for POLS Y490

Critical Thinking Rubric

Highly proficient work: student **always or nearly always**

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought or beliefs, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Proficient work: student **consistently**

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought or beliefs, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Partially proficient work: student **only occasionally**

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought or beliefs, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Not proficient work: student **almost never**

- raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely
- gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
- comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards
- thinks open-mindedly about alternative systems of thought or beliefs, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and
- communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems