

## **QEP Impact Report**

Political Science and Public Affairs

Western Carolina University

Contact: Chris Cooper, Department Head (ccooper@email.wcu.edu)

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The Department of Political Science and Public Affairs has been an enthusiastic participant in the QEP at WCU. In 2009, we took a bold step and opted to align our goals with those of the QEP, meaning that our five program goals are identical to those of the QEP. Our learning objectives tend to use more disciplinary-specific language, but they are seen as a subset of these larger goals. We assess the degree to which we achieve these goals in a variety of ways, but the most direct way is through our 1+1+1 program. In this program, students are required to take Introduction to Political Science (PSC 250) early in their academic career, Civic Engagement (PSC 250) towards the middle of their career and Portfolio (PSC 450) towards the end of their academic career. In the 450 class, students are required to write an essay where they reflect on how well the program helped them achieve their learning objectives. Using these assessments, along with a variety of other techniques, I reflect below on how well our students achieved the ability to “Practice Civic Engagement” and “Communicate Effectively and Responsibly.”

### *Communicate Effectively and Responsibly*

Students adequately addressed how the department helped them improve their written and oral communication skills. One student mentioned his for credit internship experience with a successful state senate candidate. Other out-of-class experiences that helped improve communication skills that were mentioned by students included participation in the Navy Reserve, on the Honors College Board of Directors, and as a member of the Pride of the Mountains Marching Band. Another student appreciated the number of guest speakers and noted that her in-class presentations needed to be both “entertaining and informative.” A student in Dr. Michelsen’s class highlighted the innovative zombie invasion writing assignment in his International Relations course. Another student, who participated in a year-long study abroad experience, referenced her dissertation as an important factor in her improvement as a writer. Our department’s emphasis on the importance of evidence based arguments seemed to be getting through to at least some students. A recent transfer noted that “professors expect rational thinking and innovative ideas all of course backed up with either statistical data or valid sources.” Our classes also emphasize the importance of oral communication and one student called us a “debate machine.” A student from the spring 2011 semester noted that group work helped improve his communication skills. A couple of students provided some guidance on how we could improve in the way we help students meet this learning objective. One student wondered why professors seem unwilling to challenge students in class and confront them when their comments don’t make sense. Another student wanted to see their fellow classmates dress up for presentations and advocated a more business oriented model. Overall though, students seemed to feel good about how the department was helping them meet this learning objective. Perhaps most gratifying praise was a student who noted how much political science had helped with his communication skills. He noted, that “when I interviewed for my internship I walked in with confidence.” A review of all 26 syllabi from spring 2011 showed that 16/26 (62%) sections required a paper greater than five pages. However, only one class required a paper greater 10 pages. Oral presentations were required in 8 of 26 classes (31%) but all classes included class participation as a part of the final grade in the course.

### *Practicing Civic Engagement*

According to their essays, all but 2 students satisfactorily addressed this learning objective. Students mentioned a variety of ways they had met the learning objective both inside and outside the classroom. Activities external to the department were the most popular ways students practice civic engagement. Not surprisingly, students mentioned work with fraternities and sororities, club and NCAA sports teams, and church related organizations like the Baptist Student Union. Political science courses and class projects were the next most mentioned way our students practice civic engagement. One student noted that the department “urges all of us who claim this major to take these leadership roles so that we can enforce positive changes which can be passed on to those who will come after us.” Another student said “my classes discussed the need for civic involvement and how important it was for the development and maintenance of any community to have an active community taking part in civic engagement.” A couple of students specifically referenced the PSC 349 class and its work with the nonprofit Cullowhee Revitalization Endeavor.