

**John Jay College of Criminal Justice  
Department of Political Science**

**Political Science Major Assessment Report  
2013-2014 Academic Year**

**Independent Research in the Major**

**With Notes on Advising and Responses to the  
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Rubric**

**DRAFT**

**Created 6/17/13**

## Summary of Assessment Activities

The 2012-2013 assessment report and feedback from the College Wide Assessment Committee were shared with the faculty via email in July 2013. Results and recommendations from the assessment report were presented and discussed in department meetings held on September 11, 2013, and December 10, 2013. Three of the recommendations from this report, with comments updating the department's progress, are as follows:

- The Major Coordinator will administer a revised survey on feedback received by students as permitted by course instructors.

*The survey was administered and results are presented and discussed in this report.*

- The department will investigate the possibility of obtaining writing assistance for students.

*In Fall 2013, the department created the position of Writing Coordinator (WC). Part of the WC's responsibilities included assisting students who were referred by members of the faculty. The department discontinued the position after the semester because, given the time commitment, it was an inefficient and ineffective way of addressing the writing needs of students.*

*In addition to department-wide efforts, a number of faculty incorporate methods for improving writing suggested in the 2012-2013 report (e.g., assigning drafts, allowing revisions).*

- The Major Coordinator will solicit responses from the faculty on how they provide feedback to students and whether they have adopted new procedures in light of recent departmental discussions.

*This discussion will be proposed once the department has had the opportunity to review the responses to the feedback survey administered to students.*

## Learning Outcomes Assessed

During the 2013-2014 academic year, the Political Science Department assessed the first learning outcome listed in the Major Assessment Plan:

1. Students will initiate, develop, and present independent research (*Independent Research*).

## Assessment Procedures

### *Direct Assessment of the Major*

Direct assessment was conducted using samples of written work drawn from sections of POL 225 (Introduction to Research in Politics) and POL 409 (Colloquium for Research in Government and Politics), which is the capstone course of the major, offered during the 2013-2014 academic year. Both courses are explicitly focused on student research and both are required of all major students in the current version of the major. **31 papers** are taken from POL 225 and **30 papers** are taken from POL 409, totaling **61 papers** in the sample.

Student work was directly assessed **by the Major Coordinator** using the rubric for “Independent Research,” presented in Appendix A.<sup>1</sup> The rubric was adapted from the Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubric for Inquiry and Analysis, including one item from the Problem Solving VALUE rubric, “Propose Solutions / Hypotheses.” Taken as a whole, the seven items on the rubric encompass the research process from the selection of research topics to the drawing of conclusions based on analyses.

Given that student work from different levels is assessed using the same rubric, it is important to note how different categories relate to one another.<sup>2</sup> The VALUE rubrics present four categories of performance: benchmark, milestone 2, milestone 3, and capstone. For our purposes, we equate the VALUE categories to our assessment categories as follows:

<u>VALUE</u>	<u>200-level</u>	<u>400-level</u>
Benchmark	Fails to Meet Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Milestone 2	Meets Expectations	Fails to Meet Expectations
Milestone 3	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations
Capstone	Exceeds Expectations	Exceeds Expectations

This translation demonstrates how students are expected to progress with respect to the learning outcome. Students, for example, who meet expectations in POL 225, but do not demonstrate further development of a particular skill, would fail to meet expectations in POL 409. Likewise, students that exceed expectations at a level of Milestone 3 in POL 225 would only meet expectations in POL 409.

### *Indirect Assessment*

Indirect assessment of the major is based on responses of major students to a survey titled, “Feedback on Writing Assignments,” written by the Major Coordinator and administered in several Political Science courses at the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester.<sup>3</sup> While the survey is geared towards writing skills, student perceptions of the feedback they receive on written work are certainly relevant to *Independent Research* as a learning outcome. More often

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<sup>1</sup> All tables, figures, and appendices, in that order, appear at the end of this report, immediately following the discussion of the WASC rubric.

<sup>2</sup> This can also be gleaned from the headings of the rubric.

<sup>3</sup> The survey is included as Appendix B.

than not, writing assignments in Political Science courses include a research component. The feedback that students receive on these assignments, therefore, has the potential to develop their research skills as well as their writing skills.

Surveys were administered to students in course sections at the 200, 300, and 400-levels. The results include responses from 128 Political Science majors (27% of major students registered for the Spring 2014 semester) at various stages in their academic careers. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by the number of Political Science courses they have taken at John Jay and their class standing. No group appears underrepresented in the sample except for freshman. This is expected given that students do not usually take courses in their major until they are sophomores.

## **Direct Assessment Results**

### *Overall Results*

Table 2 presents the results of direct assessment of *Independent Research*. A sample of student work drawn from POL 225 and POL 409 was scored on the seven-item rubric presented in Appendix A. Tables 2 through 4 use abbreviations for these items, defined as follows:

- Topic: assesses the level of creativity and focus of the research topic;
- Knowledge: assesses the level of depth in the discussion of existing knowledge or research, as well as the extent to which information from sources is synthesized together;
- Design: assesses the completeness and development of the research design and methodology;
- Hypotheses: assesses the level of comprehension of the problem present in the proposed solutions, arguments, or hypotheses;
- Analysis: assesses the degree to which evidence is organized to reveal important patterns related to the focus of the research;
- Conclusions: assesses the synthesis of evidence into conclusions responding to the research topic;
- Limitations: assesses the extent to which the research process is critiqued and the discussion of how results apply to a broader context.

In general, students perform well with respect to *Independent Research*. Over half of students in the sample exceed expectations on “Topic,” “Knowledge,” and “Conclusions.” Over eighty percent of students at least meet expectations on five of the seven rubric items. The two items for which this is not the case are “Design” and “Limitations,” suggesting students need additional instruction in developing proper research designs, using various research methods correctly and appropriately, and providing fuller discussions of the limitations of their research and the broader implications of their findings. In one way, the two results dovetail. If students are exhibiting problems appropriately applying a specific research design, they are likely also experiencing difficulties critiquing that design.

### *Impact of POL 225 on Research in the Capstone*

POL 225 was developed in response to the Department's perceptions of student needs with respect to conducting independent research. POL 225 was first offered in Spring 2013 and has been offered every semester since. To assess the impact that POL 225 has had on the development of students' research skills, we offer Tables 3 and 4.

While not directly related to the impact of POL 225 on POL 409, Table 3 does provide an analysis of student progression through levels of proficiency for each item in the *Independent Research* rubric. The last column shows the difference between the percentage of POL 409 students that exceed (400-level proficiency) or meet (300-level proficiency) expectations and the percentage of POL 225 students that exceed expectations (300-level proficiency or higher). Positive differences, therefore, indicate students are at least maintaining a high level of proficiency, as demonstrated in POL 225. The results are very positive. On all but two items, students show gains in research proficiency between the 200 and 400-levels. On "Knowledge," the difference of -0.65 is negligible. On "Conclusions," there is a 10.43 point decrease. In looking at performance in the courses individually, students performed well on this task in POL 225. Students in POL 409, however, appeared stuck at the 200-level proficiency.

It is difficult at this stage to directly assess whether students who have taken POL 225 exhibit greater proficiency in conducting independent research in POL 409. There have not been many students in POL 409 yet that have also taken POL 225, but there have been some. Table 4 presents some limited statistical evidence of the positive impact of POL 225 on conducting independent research. The next couple of academic years will likely afford greater opportunities for this type of direct assessment whereas we expect a more equal mix of students in POL 409 who have and have not taken POL 225.

Table 4 presents the mean scores on all seven rubric items for the five POL 409 students in the sample that took POL 225 and the twenty-five POL 409 students that did not. The scores range from 1 to 3 with higher scores implying greater proficiency on the particular rubric item. The last column of Table 4 presents the differences between the means of students that took POL 225 and students that did not. Students that took POL 225 had a higher mean on all seven items; three of these differences are significant for at least the 10% level (on "Topic," "Knowledge," and "Conclusions"). Students that have taken POL 225 appear better able to select a creative, focused topic, provide better synthesis of the existing literature, and draw sounder conclusions based on their research.

Relating these results to those previously discussed, students in POL 409 who have not taken POL 225 appear to need additional instruction in drawing conclusions based on their findings. On one level, this deficiency in skill development will likely disappear over time; with each semester, the proportion of students in POL 409 who have not taken POL 225 will necessarily decrease. For now, POL 409 instructors can provide instruction on how to properly draw conclusions based on inquiry findings; this will develop the skill for "non-225" students and reinforce the skill for "225" students. In the future, instructors can tailor their lectures towards the development of more academically rigorous discussions in written work.

## Indirect Assessment Results

Indirect assessment of *Independent Research* is conducted through a survey administered to students asking for their evaluations of the feedback they receive on their written work in Political Science courses. Students were asked to rate the quality of feedback they have received, using a four-point scale (poor, fair, good, and excellent), on three dimensions: overall feedback, feedback on content, and feedback on writing. The results are presented in Figure 1. Students rate the quality of the feedback they receive highly. The modal response, which is also the majority response, to all three questions is “Good.” Around 30% of students rate the quality of feedback in each question as “Excellent.” On overall feedback, 80.2% of students rate quality at least “Good.” On content feedback and writing feedback, the equivalent percentages are 87.4% and 83.5% respectively.

Additionally, students were asked how frequently, using a five-point scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always), they read the feedback they receive and apply that feedback to future assignments.<sup>4</sup> These results are presented in Figure 2. Looking at the last two sets of bars, over 90% of students report reading and applying the feedback they receive at least “Often.” The clear modal and majority response to both questions is “Always.”

Beyond these overall results, we looked for variation in responses related to three academic characteristics on which students were asked to place themselves: the number of Political Science (POL) courses taken at John Jay, class standing, and major concentration. Responses did not vary significantly by the number of POL courses taken or by concentration, but there were some significant differences related to class standing. On Questions 5 and 6, ratings of overall quality of feedback and ratings of quality of feedback on content respectively, seniors tend to offer more positive ratings and freshman tend to offer more negative ratings.<sup>5</sup> Similar results are observed for student perceptions of the frequency with which they are assigned to write drafts of writing assignments (Question 9) and are allowed to revise their work to improve their grades (Question 10). On both questions, perceptions of frequency increases with class standing.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, no significant differences emerged on the frequency of reading or applying feedback.

Taken with the direct assessment results, the indirect results speak positively about faculty development of student research skills. The survey results are particularly important in this respect because both of the major’s research-oriented courses employ a significant amount of scaffolding to teach research skills. This implies numerous opportunities for students to receive feedback on the work they will later add to their research projects. According to these results, students are largely satisfied with the quality of the feedback they receive on their written work. Students report that they read and apply that feedback at a high level of frequency. The direct assessment results show that students are at least meeting expectations in large proportions for practically all of the rubric items.

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<sup>4</sup> The survey also asked about the frequency with which students were assigned multiple assignments, assigned drafts, and given the opportunity to revise their work to improve their grades. Reading and applying feedback are, however, the primary focus of this report.

<sup>5</sup> The Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistics are 30.10 ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 18.13 ( $p = 0.034$ ) for questions 5 and 6 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> The Pearson  $\chi^2$  statistics are 22.27 ( $p = 0.035$ ) and 24.98 ( $p = 0.015$ ) for questions 9 and 10 respectively

## **Recommendations**

Students performed well on the direct assessment measures and note satisfaction with the feedback they receive according to the indirect assessment measures. The results suggest a couple of minor steps that can be taken to further improve these results:

- **The Major Coordinator will continue the discussion of writing and research skills with the faculty in the context of the feedback survey. Themes of this discussion will include faculty satisfaction with student application of feedback and what, if any, major-wide adjustments are appropriate to improving the development of students' skills (by Spring 2015).**
- **The Major Coordinator will arrange a meeting with POL 225 and POL 409 instructors to discuss ways that both courses could be restructured so that students in POL 409 can further develop the skills they started building in POL 225 (by Spring 2015).**

## **A Note on Advising in the Major**

Given the emphasis placed on advising in the major by the Office of Undergraduate Studies, we include this brief note as an initial and indirect assessment of advising in the major. Prior to the Spring 2014 semester, the Major Coordinator asked faculty involved with advising in the major to provide a tally of students advised during the Spring semester. Advising done by the Coordinator in the Fall 2013 semester is added to these figures yielding the estimates presented in the next paragraph.

Major advisors, including the Coordinator and Department Chair, communicated with over 150 students during the 2013-2014 academic year, representing close to one-third (31.6%) of major students registered in the Spring 2014 semester. Of these, at least twenty students sought advice multiple times on multiple issues.

## **Responses to the WASC Rubric**

In the May 6, 2014, meeting of Undergraduate Coordinators, the Director of Outcomes Assessment, Dr. Virginia Moreno, asked program coordinators to score their use of capstone experiences for assessing program learning outcomes using a rubric developed by WASC. The responses for Political Science are as follows:

<u>Criterion</u>	
Relevant Outcomes and Lines of Evidence Identified	<b>Highly Developed</b>
Valid Results	<b>Highly Developed</b>
Reliable Results	<b>Emerging</b>
Results Are Used	<b>Developed</b>
The Student Experience	<b>Initial</b>

<b>Table 1.</b>		
<b>Distribution of Respondents to the Feedback Survey</b>		
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b><i>Political Science (POL) Courses Taken at John Jay</i></b>		
1 to 3	48	37.50%
4 to 6	27	21.09%
7 to 9	39	30.47%
10 or more	14	10.94%
<i>Total</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>100.00%</i>
<b><i>Class Standing</i></b>		
Freshman (0-29 credits)	11	8.59%
Sophomore (30-59 credits)	29	22.66%
Junior (60-89 credits)	48	37.50%
Senior (90 credits or more)	40	31.25%
<i>Total</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>100.00%</i>

**Table 2.**  
**Direct Assessment of *Independent Research***

<i>Rubric Item</i>	<i>Exceeds Expectations</i>	<i>Meets Expectations</i>	<i>Exceeds + Meets</i>	<i>Fails to Meet Expectations</i>
Topic	54.10%	31.15%	<b>85.25%</b>	14.75%
Knowledge	62.30%	27.87%	<b>90.16%</b>	9.84%
Design	31.15%	36.07%	<b>67.21%</b>	32.79%
Hypotheses	0.00%	81.97%	<b>81.97%</b>	18.03%
Analysis	29.51%	52.46%	<b>81.97%</b>	18.03%
Conclusions	50.82%	37.70%	<b>88.52%</b>	11.48%
Limitations	13.11%	40.98%	<b>54.10%</b>	45.90%
Note: Scores reported in this table include the full sample: 31 examples of student work from POL 225 and 30 from POL 409.				

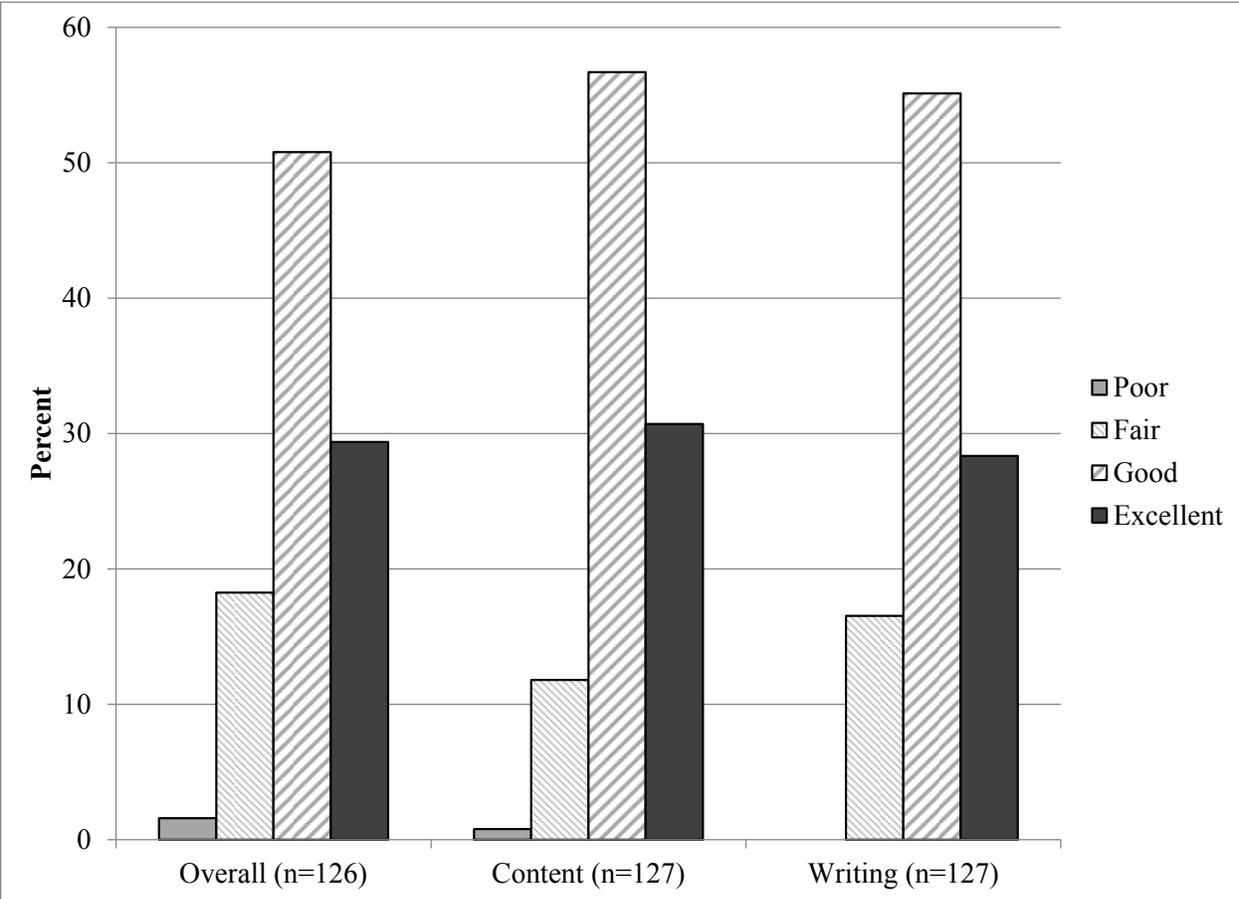
**Table 3.**  
**Student Progression through Levels *Independent Research***

<i>Rubric Item</i>	<u>225</u> <i>Exceeds</i>	<u>409</u> <i>Exceeds + Meets</i>	<i>Difference</i> <i>(409 – 225)</i>
Topic	77.42%	80.00%	<b>2.58%</b>
Knowledge	80.65%	80.00%	<i>-0.65%</i>
Design	48.39%	56.67%	<b>8.28%</b>
Hypotheses	0.00%	70.00%	<b>70.00%</b>
Analysis	38.71%	73.33%	<b>34.62%</b>
Conclusions	87.10%	76.67%	<i>-10.43%</i>
Limitations	12.90%	63.33%	<b>50.43%</b>

Note: This table presents an analysis of student progression through levels of proficiency for each item in the *Independent Research* rubric. The difference is between the percentage of POL 409 students that exceed (400-level proficiency) or meet (300-level proficiency) expectations and the percentage of POL 225 students that exceed expectations (300-level proficiency or higher). Positive differences, therefore, indicate students are at least maintaining a high level of proficiency demonstrated in POL 225.

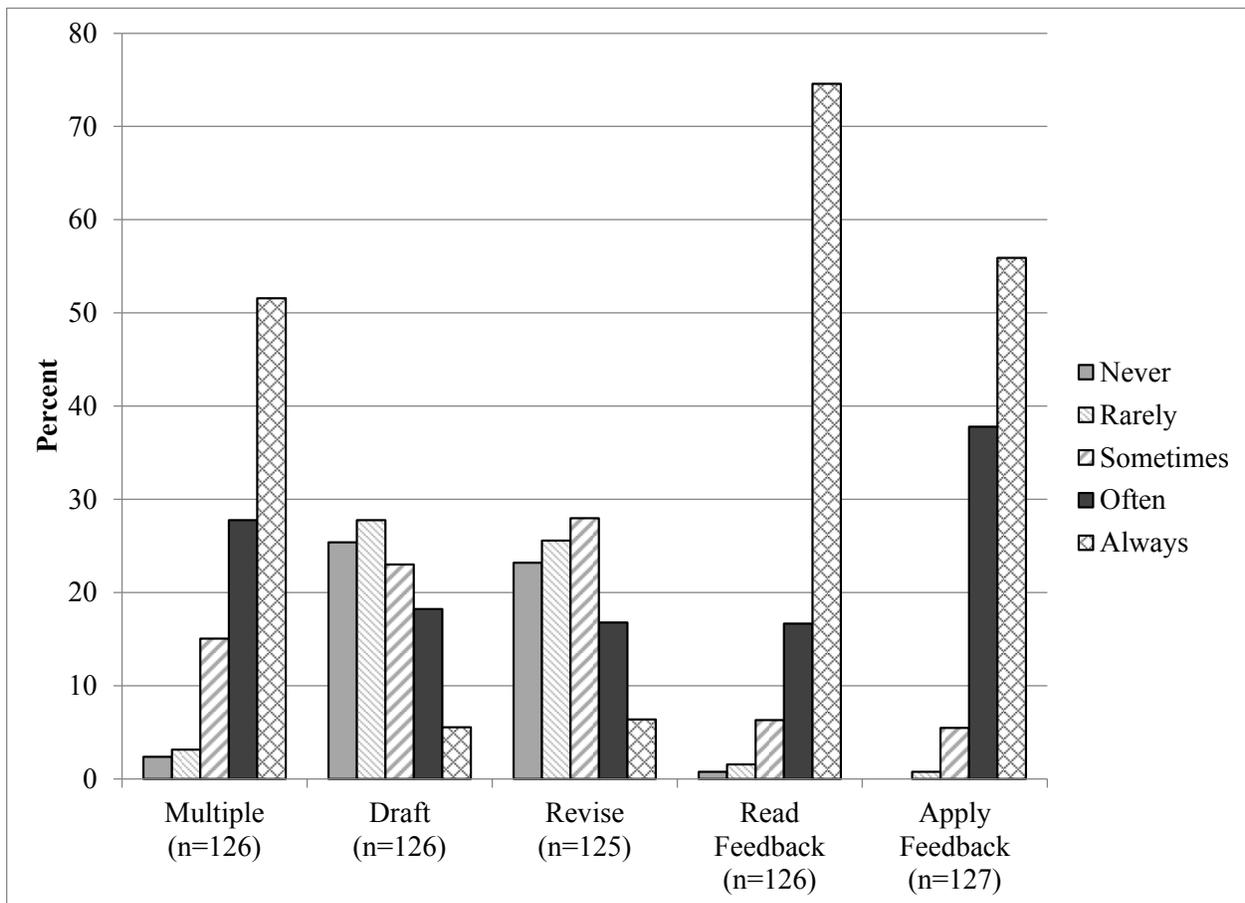
**Bolded** differences indicate increases in student performance; *italicized* differences indicate decreases in student performance.

<b>Table 4.</b>			
<b>The Effects of POL 225 on Research Skills Exhibited in POL 409</b>			
<i>Rubric Item</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>Non-225</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Topic	2.60	2.00	0.60**
Knowledge	2.60	2.16	0.44*
Design	2.00	1.64	0.36
Hypotheses	1.80	1.68	0.12
Analysis	2.00	1.92	0.08
Conclusions	2.20	1.84	0.36*
Limitations	2.20	1.68	0.52
Total Score	15.40	12.92	2.48*
Observations	5	25	
* p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05 (one-tailed tests)			
Note: This table presents difference in means tests between the mean scores of POL 409 students in the sample that have taken POL 225 and students that have not taken POL 225. Each proficiency level is coded as follows: fails to meet expectations = 1; meets expectations = 2; exceeds expectations = 3. For any given rubric item, the mean score can range from 1 to 3. The difference between mean total scores is also examined. The range for total scores is 7 (scoring 1 on all items) to 21 (scoring 3 on all items).			



**Figure 1.**  
**Student Evaluations of Feedback Received on Writing Assignments**

Note: Figure 1 graphs responses to questions 5 through 7 of the “Feedback on Writing Assignments” survey. Question 5 asks students to rate the overall quality of feedback received. Question 6 asks students to rate the quality of feedback on the content of their assignments. Question 7 asks students to rate the quality of feedback on their writing.



**Figure 2.**

**Student Perceptions of the Frequency of Types of Assignments and their Use of Feedback**

Note: Figure 2 graphs responses to questions 8 through 12 of the “Feedback on Writing Assignments” survey. Question 8 asks students how often their Political Science courses have required multiple writing assignments. Question 9 asks students how often their Political Science courses have required a draft. Question 10 asks students how often their Political Science courses have allowed them to revise assignments to improve their grades. Question 11 asks students how often they read the feedback given on their writing assignments. Question 12 asks students how often they apply the feedback given on their writing assignments.

## Appendix A: Rubric for Learning Outcome 1: Independent Research

<i>Item</i>	<i>POL 225: POL 409:</i>	<i>Exceeds Expectations Exceeds Expectations</i>	<i>Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations</i>	<i>Meets Expectations Fails to Meet Expectations</i>	<i>Fails to Meet Expectations Fails to Meet Expectations</i>
<b>Topic selection</b>		Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of the topic.	Identifies a focused and manageable/doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that is far too general and wide-ranging as to be manageable and doable.
<b>Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views</b>		Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Presents information from irrelevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.
<b>Design Process</b>		All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized across disciplines or relevant subdisciplines.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed, however, more subtle elements are ignored or unaccounted for.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are missing, incorrectly developed, or unfocused.	Inquiry design demonstrates a misunderstanding of the methodology or theoretical framework.
<b>Propose Solutions / Hypotheses (Problem Solving Rubric)</b>		Proposes one or more solutions/hypotheses that indicates a deep comprehension of the problem. Solution / hypotheses are sensitive to contextual factors as well as all of the following: ethical, logical, and cultural dimensions of the problem.	Proposes one or more solutions/hypotheses that indicates comprehension of the problem. Solutions / hypotheses are sensitive to contextual factors as well as the one of the following: ethical, logical, or cultural dimensions of the problem.	Proposes one solution/hypothesis that is “off the shelf” rather than individually designed to address the specific contextual factors of the problem.	Proposes a solution/hypothesis that is difficult to evaluate because it is vague or only indirectly addresses the problem statement.
<b>Analysis</b>		Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities.	Lists evidence, but it is not organized and/or is unrelated to focus.
<b>Conclusions</b>		States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.	States a conclusion focused solely on the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to inquiry findings.	States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.	States an ambiguous, illogical, or unsupported conclusion from inquiry findings.
<b>Limitations and Implications</b>		Insightfully discusses in detail relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Discusses relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents limitations and implications, but are possibly irrelevant and unsupported.

## Appendix B: Feedback on Writing Assignments

First, thank you for taking the time to look at this survey. The Department of Political Science is interested in your opinions about the feedback you have received from instructors on writing assignments. Please note that your responses to EVERY QUESTION in this survey are VOLUNTARY. That is, you may choose to not answer any question or questions you do not wish answer. Your responses are also ANONYMOUS. You do not have to identify yourself anywhere on the survey. Please circle your answers unless you are asked to provide a longer response. **If you have filled out this survey in another course, please do not fill it out now.**

First, we would like to know a little about you as a student.

1. How many Political Science (POL) courses have you taken at John Jay College (please include courses you are currently taking)?

**1 to 3**

**4 to 6**

**7 to 9**

**10 or more**

2. What is your current class standing?

**Freshman  
(10 to 29 credits)**

**Sophomore  
(30 to 59 credits)**

**Junior  
(60 to 89 credits)**

**Senior  
(90 or more credits)**

3. If you ARE a Political Science MAJOR, what is your Concentration?

**A  
Law, Courts, and  
Politics**

**B  
Justice and  
Politics**

**C  
American and  
Urban Politics and  
Policy**

**D  
Comparative/  
International Politics  
and Human Rights**

4. If you are NOT a Political Science major, what is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

4a. Are you a Political Science MINOR?

[ YES ]

[ NO ]

Turning now to feedback, please answer the following questions considering **all of the Political Science courses** you have taken. Feedback includes the comments, written or verbal, one receives on work. Feedback can be given before an assignment is completed and when graded assignments are returned. Feedback on work can serve two purposes. First, feedback on graded assignments provides an explanation for the grades received. Second, feedback on assignments before and after they have been completed can improve performance on future assignments.

5. Please rate the OVERALL quality of the feedback you have received from instructors on your written work in the Political Science courses you have taken.

[ Excellent ]

[ Good ]

[ Fair ]

[ Poor ]

PLEASE TURN OVER

6. Please rate the quality of the feedback you have received on the content of your assignment (how your work addresses the topic of the assignment, its questions, and/or its prompts).

[ **Excellent** ]                      [ **Good** ]                      [ **Fair** ]                      [ **Poor** ]

7. Please rate the quality of the feedback you have received on your writing (grammar, spelling, organization, etc.).

[ **Excellent** ]                      [ **Good** ]                      [ **Fair** ]                      [ **Poor** ]

8. In the Political Science courses you have taken, how often have you been required to complete more than one writing assignment?

[**Always**]              [ **Often** ]              [ **Sometimes** ]              [ **Rarely** ]              [ **Never** ]

9. In the Political Science courses you have taken, how often have you been required to submit a draft?

[**Always**]              [ **Often** ]              [ **Sometimes** ]              [ **Rarely** ]              [ **Never** ]

10. In the Political Science courses you have taken, how often have you been allowed to revise a completed assignment to improve your grade?

[**Always**]              [ **Often** ]              [ **Sometimes** ]              [ **Rarely** ]              [ **Never** ]

11. How often do you read the feedback on your written work given by instructors?

[**Always**]              [ **Often** ]              [ **Sometimes** ]              [ **Rarely** ]              [ **Never** ]

12. How often do you apply any of the feedback you have received to future writing assignments?

[**Always**]              [ **Often** ]              [ **Sometimes** ]              [ **Rarely** ]              [ **Never** ]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!