

**American Government as a General Education Course:
Assessment to Improve Teaching and Learning**

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INTRODUCTION

Trends in higher education in recent years require most professors, including Political Science professors, to be more systematic in assessing how well our programs and courses meet intended goals. This involves specifying goals and objectives, developing research designs to help us determine if we achieve those, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing reports on our findings for such people and groups as our department chairs and committees, college deans and committees, university presidents and committees, boards of trustees or regents, accreditation examiners, and others.

Political Science professors have mixed reactions to this emphasis on formal assessment. On the one hand, most political scientists have a good deal of respect for empirical investigation and informed decision making. We are suspicious of those who justify a particular public policy or method of implementation “because it has always been done that way.” Constant assessment of what lectures and assignments work and what do not work is already a regular part of a professor’s life. Furthermore, systematic gathering of information is a common aspect of many political scientists’ research agendas.

On the other hand, **formal** assessment **mandated by others** is viewed by many faculty members as a time consuming and unrewarding activity, only carried out so that the institution one teaches at remains an accredited institution of higher learning. It is often viewed as decreasing one’s autonomy in the classroom and increasing scrutiny by outsiders who are not necessarily trusted to have the best interests of the students or faculty in mind. There is concern that these formal assessments steer time and effort toward easily measurable course objectives and away from important, but less easily measurable, objectives. Finally, some suspect that ulterior motives are behind this emphasis on assessment and that this emphasis is both an indicator and result of the declining respect in our society for teachers.

In some cases the two positions outlined above emerge as a debate between faculty members. However, in many cases individuals internalize this conflict and thus are ambivalent about the value of the increasing emphasis on assessment in academia.

This presentation addresses both the promise of assessment and concerns about it, particularly as it relates to the assessment of introductory American government courses within a general education programs. A number of factors influence whether a formal assessment program helps to improve teaching and learning or whether the whole process becomes a time-consuming nightmare. To gain a preliminary understanding of these factors, this exploratory study examined writings on assessment and my own experience with the general education assessment of an introductory American Government at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. It is important to emphasize the limited nature of this examination and the lessons learned since they are drawn from a single case. To arrive at more general conclusions, a thorough study of the general education assessment processes at more institutions and a fuller review of the literature would be needed.

OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT OF GENERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – RIVER FALLS

The University of Wisconsin – River Falls (UW-RF) took several years to create a new general education program which went into effect for entering students in the fall of 2005. The old general education program did not have an assessment component. In the old program, courses went through an approval process to be designated as general education courses, but there was no periodic monitoring of those courses. In the new program, a course is only approved for a limited number of years, at which point it needs to be reviewed and re-approved by a general education committee. The original proposal for each course must include an assessment plan, and the periodic reviews require that the results of the course assessments be reported to the general education committee.

American Government within the General Education Program

The introductory American Government course at UW-RF was approved as a course under the category “Social and Behavioral Science” in the spring of 2005. The goal of Social and Behavioral Science courses is for students to be able to “demonstrate knowledge of past and present human endeavor.” There are 5 criteria listed for this category, and each course approved for this category must meet at least two of those criteria. The 5 criteria state that Social and Behavioral Science courses:

- a. are based on empirical research and human experience.**
- b. will analyze the interconnectedness of local and global concerns.
- c. will describe the ways in which civic, economic, and/or social relationships are determined.**
- d. will apply historical perspectives to contemporary issues.
- e. will examine factors that affect the development of human behavior and adaptation.

The two criteria which apply to the introductory American Government course are “a” and “c” shown in bold face above.

The objectives of the American government course, below, are congruent with the general education goal for social and behavior science courses and with criteria “a” and “c” above.

The overall goal of the course is to enable students to acquire the information and skills they need to function as intelligent citizens. Specifically the course 1)introduces students to the basic structure, institutions, actors and processes that shape contemporary American politics at the national, state and local levels; 2)introduces students to the fundamental values and value conflicts that inform debates in American politics; 3)introduces students to the issues of public policy that dominate contemporary public discourse; and 4)helps students develop the critical thinking skills they need to evaluate the public issues and choices they will be presented with throughout their lives. (These objectives are from the official course syllabus for Political Science 114 at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls)

In addition to the criteria, all courses designated as a Social and Behavior Science course must meet all 3 of the category's outcomes. The table below includes a description of the 3 outcomes, ways the American Government course meets the 3 outcomes, and the procedures designed by the department of Political Science for assessing those outcomes.

Outcome	How will outcome be met?	What assessment procedure(s) will be used?
Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse principles that explain human behavior.	Students will be presented with the normative and empirical concepts used by political science to understand the American political system. These include, but are not limited to, democracy, freedom, equality, representation, citizenship, political culture, political participation, federalism, public opinion and ideology, and voting behavior.	The instructors in this class all use a common text book that includes a set of standard questions. A Pre-test of 50-60 questions is to be administered during the first week of class; an agreed set of about 20 of these questions will be incorporated into the exams that are given throughout the semester. The responses to the questions for all sections will be compiled. For each question, the percent of students who answered it correctly will be determined. About 10 of the 20 questions will test the students' grasp of the major concepts used to understand American politics.
Students will apply the methods of the social sciences.	The results of survey research, content analysis, quantitative statistical analysis and other social science methods that are employed by political scientists to understand political behavior such as voting and political participation will be part of class readings, lectures, discussions and assignments. Students will be shown how to properly interpret the results of empirical research and will be exposed to the basic methods used to conduct such research	About 10 of the 20 multiple choice questions noted above will test the students' understanding of the practices used by political scientists to research and draw conclusions about institutional and individual human behavior.
Students will identify and analyze human activities and/or institutions in the broad variety of human contexts within past and/or present time.	Students will study the institutional framework of the American political system in lectures, class discussions and readings. Students will study how the American political systems has changed over time. They will study the major political institutions of American politics (the legislative, executive, judicial branches of government) as well as non-governmental political actors such as interest groups, political parties, and the media. They will also examine how these political actors and institutions interact in order to reach political and policy decisions.	Students will apply the concepts and empirical evidence from the course in order to address different perspectives that exist regarding various components of the political system in a written assignment comparing two perspectives on a single issue. Assignment and evaluation criteria are attached.

The first two outcomes, “Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse principles that explain human behavior” and “Students will apply the methods of the social sciences” are assessed through multiple choice questions. In the spring and fall of 2006, a pretest with 65 multiple-choice items was administered to students in all sections of the American Government course (see Appendix A). As the semesters progressed faculty inserted these questions into their regular exams. In the spring of 2006, the first semester this assessment procedure was used, faculty were asked to include all of the questions from the pretest within their regular exams. In the fall of 2006, 19 of the questions were selected for inclusion in the regular exams. The results for all the students were aggregated so that for each question, we could compare the percent of students who answered correctly on the pretest to the percent of students who answered correctly after the material had been covered in their class (see Appendix B).

The third outcome, “Students will identify and analyze human activities and/or institutions in the broad variety of human contexts within past and/or present time,” is measured through a written assignment in which students compare two essays that take contrasting perspectives on a single issue. Faculty members use the same assignment instructions but each decides which pairs of essays the students will analyze (see Appendix C).

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: Collect information that will make the assessment effort meaningful to the department and individual faculty members even if that information is not required by the general education committee and outside audiences.

The general education committee was only interested in the ability of students to achieve the stated goals of the course by the end of the semester. Therefore, the pre-test of 65 multiple choice items was unnecessary as far as the University’s General Education Committee was concerned. However, faculty teaching American Government wanted to know what students came into the course with and what they gained after having been in the course. In the language of assessment, we wanted a measure of “value added.” The results were very gratifying for the faculty teaching the course. It was very clear that students learned a great deal during their semester in American government. As Table 1 in Appendix B shows, students in the spring and fall arrived in the course with very limited knowledge in many areas and left with substantially more knowledge in many of those areas. By including the pre-test, the assessment process provided the faculty members with a sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, the pre-test gives us information that can help us determine where limited class time can be more usefully spent. If students already have a strong background in some areas, we can devote less time to those and use that time for topic they are less familiar with. Finally, if continued into the future, the pre-test will tell faculty if students are coming to campus more or less prepared for the course than in the past. All of these benefits give instructors a real incentive to participate in the process. As Aloï, Gardner and Lusher (2003) argue, “the internal audiences [which include faculty] should benefit from the results of various assessments even if the assessment has been prompted by outside interests.”

Lesson 2: “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize.” The main goal of an assessment process is to improve teaching and learning. Becoming too obsessed by such concerns as inter-rater reliability of student essays by multiple instructors can distract you from that goal.

Precision of measurement and consistency across faculty members is much easier to achieve with the previously discussed multiple choice items used to assess outcomes 1 and 2 than with the written essays used to assess outcome 3. Although Justice Stewart was referring to obscenity when he said “I know if when I see it,” he might as well have been referring to an “A” paper or a “D” paper. Just as it is easier to identify “obscenity” when you see it than to write up clear criteria which could be used by anyone to determine if something is obscene, so too it is easier for each of us to grade papers individually than to come up with a set of criteria that would allow 4 individuals to assign the same grade to each paper we received. In larger departments, this becomes an even greater problem.

The general answer to consistency in the assessment literature, even when a single faculty is grading everything, is a grading rubric. (See the rubric used for student essays and the results of the assessment for this component in Appendix C.) There is a dilemma, however, with such rubrics. In this case, strict adherence to the rubric would require faculty to give a blanket “yes” or “no” to such criteria as “the basic position of each author is accurately and clearly identified” and “the supporting arguments made by the authors of each article are clearly, accurately, and completely stated.” Rarely does an absolute “yes” or “no” seem accurate. However if the rubric were to be rewritten so as to allow more levels of achievement for each criterion, it would become a much more complex and artificially mathematical way of evaluating written work. What is to be done?

Early on in the process I became a bit obsessed with the issue of inter-rater reliability and wanted to perfect the rubric and make sure it was being used consistently by different faculty members. Then I learned lesson 2. I credit Barbara Walvoord, author of *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education* (2004), who came to our campus twice in 2006 as an assessment consultant, with teaching me this lesson. Although she did not use the phrase “keep your eyes on the prize,” it expresses well what she told us. To paraphrase, she argued that too much of a fixation on uniformity in the use of assignments or rubrics may not be the most effective way of getting to our goal. If a department could agree on a common assignment and rubric, fine, but if not, you may sacrifice more than you gain by forcing it. The most important part of assessment is the feedback loop. According to Walvoord, you need to figure out what changes to make on the basis of what you have learned and be able to explain that to a variety of audiences including accreditation organizations. Fortunately, getting the feedback loop right is also what will make the assessment process most useful and gratifying to the faculty members themselves. Thus, having a procedure in place to assess strengths and weaknesses and make improvements is what both the outsiders and the insiders want.

Lesson 3: The key to doing a good job with the feedback loop is holding meetings where the relevant faculty members discuss the aggregate data collected, their impressions of what students had problems with, and ways to improve the teaching and learning in the course. The minutes of those meetings, or excerpts of those minutes, become part of the assessment data included in assessment reports.

As part of the assessment process, Walvoord recommended that meetings, which include the instructors who teach the course being assessed, need to be held on a periodic basis. At such meetings the data that has been formally collected is reviewed. In addition, it is crucial that the more general impressions faculty members have about the course are elicited and discussed. In our meetings we have discussed the difficulties students seem to have with the written assignment and shared strategies for overcoming those. For example, many students seemed to “miss the forest for the trees” when trying to describe the main points of an essay they read. These students identified a few arguments made by the author, but often only minor ones, or even when they did identify major arguments, they treated them in isolation from one another. By itself, the data which showed what percent of students met 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 or 0 of the criteria on the rubric did not reveal this common problem. The discussion among the faculty did. In terms of costs, the time spent at the meeting was relatively short compared to the time it would have taken to try to refine the rubric to make sure all papers would have received the same evaluation no matter who graded it. In terms of benefits, this meeting clarified a key area to focus on, whereas there is no reason to believe that even a more elaborate rubric, used perfectly consistently, would have done so.

An extension of lesson 3 is that the usefulness of sharing such insights at the department or sub-department level also exists at much broader levels. Sharing across departments, colleges, and nation-wide at conferences such as this Conference on Teaching and Learning, make it much more likely that the knowledge we receive through assessment improve teaching and learning. It also reduces the time of each department and instructor reinventing the wheel. We can learn from each others’ successes and failures. A similar point is made by Huber and Hutchings (2006) when they write about a “teaching commons” where teachers can “share what they discover with colleagues who can build on their insights.” They argue that “such work has the potential to transform higher education by making the private work of the classroom visible, talked about, studied, built upon and valued – conditions for ongoing improvement in any enterprise.”

Lesson 4: Course assessment is a process, a continuing and iterative process. The assessment tools, course content, and course procedures should not be set in stone. Each semester, adjustments and incremental improvements in the course and our means of assessment can be made.

I first learned this lesson in the assessment context from Susan Hatfield, an assessment consultant brought to our campus as the general education program was being designed. However, it reminded me of classic works in political science, sociology, and economics about decision making such as the classic article “The Science of ‘Muddling Through’” by Charles Lindblom (1959). While it may dismay some that national security decisions are made with the methods described and recommended by Lindblom, his description of

‘muddling through’ seems entirely appropriate for course assessment and improvement. Courses are not once in a lifetime events, they are carried out semester after semester. While it may be a good idea to entirely revamp courses sometimes, incremental changes at the margins are not only more realistic, but probably will be more successful most of the time.

Another area of social science literature relevant to assessment are writings about the methodology of applied research, participatory research, and action research. For example, sociologist William Whyte (1989) identifies participatory action research (PAR) as a “powerful methodology for advancing scientific knowledge as well as for achieving practical objectives.” He distinguishes this from what he calls the “professional expert” model in the following excerpt:

PAR is a type of applied social research that contrasts with what probably is the most common type, which I call the “professional expert” model. In that model, the researcher is called upon – or arranges to be called upon – to carry out a study to answer questions posed and to advise decision makers what course of action to take. Where the project involves determining the facts in a given problem are, this model can be both scientifically legitimate and highly useful to practitioners...Where the social researcher gets involved in a continuing process of organizational change, the professional expert role is much less useful for generating knowledge or for determining the course of change. Success in organizational change is not achieved simply by making the right decision at a particular time but rather through developing a social process that facilitates organizational learning (Whyte 1989, 368).

Again the idea is that we should not confuse one-shot evaluations with the process-oriented and continuing nature of assessment. By keeping this in mind, the research methods and strategies are likely to be more appropriate. In addition, it helps to reduce nagging fears that an assessment instrument is not yet good enough that can immobilize a department or assessment coordinator of a department. By remembering that the process itself requires that we continually identify problems in one round of assessment and iron them out in the next round, the burden of trying to design the perfect instrument at this moment is taken away. Also, we should remember that we can find, within political science and other social science disciplines, frameworks and methods that could prove useful in educational assessment and change.

Finally, the fact that the process is continuing, allows us to concentrate on different aspects of our courses at different times. When we “develop an incremental formula for outcome-based learning” (Aloi, Gardner and Lusher 2003, 246) we can identify one or two items in the course being assessed to take action on at this point in time. This is what Wallvord recommended during her consultation visit. To emphasize this point she explained that the ship will sink if you try to do too much at once. In assessment, “less is more.” Following this advice in regard to the results of the spring 2006 multiple choice results, we decided to focus on the need to do a better job explaining the importance of partisanship in the organization and leadership in Congress (see Appendix A, question # 48 and the results for question # 48 in Appendix B). Unfortunately, as the data from the fall of 2006 suggest, we have not solved that shorting coming of the course yet.

CONCLUSION

The mixed reactions faculty members have when the push for assessment begins to demand more of their time and attention are perfectly reasonable. The way assessment is carried out can make all the difference as to whether the ultimate experience will be a valuable one to instructors and students, or a waste of precious time better spent in other activities. The five lessons I have learned so far have transformed the experience for me into a largely positive experience. By sharing these lessons with others and in turn taking advantage of what others have learned my hope is that the assessment process remains a positive experience into the future.

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APPENDIX A: ASSESSING THE FIRST AND SECOND OUTCOMES

THE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. The concept of "civic virtue" refers to people putting aside their own self interest and making political decisions based on what was best for the public good.
 - a. true
 - b. false
2. In a representative democracy
 - a. all the citizens vote directly on issues of public policy.
 - b. only those with high levels of education are allowed to vote directly on issues of public policy.
 - c. the citizens participate in policy decision making indirectly though the election of officials.
 - d. all policy issues are decided by initiative and referendum.
3. Enlightenment political philosophy put the highest emphasis on the rights of
 - a. the individual.
 - b. the wealthy.
 - c. monarchs.
 - d. women.
4. The Bill of Rights
 - a. is found in the Declaration of Independence.
 - b. was added to the U.S. Constitution before the Constitution was ratified by the states.
 - c. was opposed by Anti-Federalists.
 - d. refers to the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution and aims to protect the freedom of individuals from unreasonable intrusion by the government.
5. Under the Articles of Confederation
 - a. the power of the states was much greater than the power of the national government.
 - b. the power of the national government was greater than the power of the states.
 - c. power was divided fairly evenly between the states and the national government.
6. James Madison favored separating powers into different branches of government because
 - a. it would be a more efficient and timely way to carry out the government's responsibilities.
 - b. it would increase the chance that the interests of the majority on all issues would be carried out by the entire government.
 - c. it would reduce the possibility that a majority faction could take over all parts of government and exercise power tyrannically over a minority of the population.
 - d. that was how government was organized in Great Britain.

7. In our system of checks and balances, which of the following Congressional powers allow Congress to limit the actions of the President?
 - a. Congress can override a presidential veto of its legislation.
 - b. Congress has the power of the purse and provides funds for the government's programs.
 - c. Congress can impeach president and remove the president from office.
 - d. All of the above.
8. Anti-Federalists argued that the Constitution
 - a. gave too much power to the common man.
 - b. was a threat to individual liberty.
 - c. would take away powers from the national government.
 - d. gave too much power to the states.
9. The *Federalist Papers*
 - a. make the case for declaring independence from Great Britain.
 - b. make the case for remaining a part of Great Britain.
 - c. present arguments in favor of the ratification of the Constitution.
 - d. present arguments against the ratification of the Constitution.
10. In our federal system of government, only the national government is given significant powers by the constitution.
 - a. true
 - b. false
11. Under our constitution states can
 - a. negotiate treaties with foreign countries.
 - b. have their own currency system.
 - c. tax, make laws, and spend money.
 - d. none of the above.
12. U.S. Supreme Court rulings on cases involving the Establishment Clause
 - a. state that no student can voluntarily engage in private prayer in a public school building.
 - b. state that mandatory prayer in the public schools is unconstitutional.
 - c. have been viewed so favorably by the public that there is no controversy surrounding them.
 - d. do not touch upon issues having to do with the public schools
13. Supreme Court rulings have clarified that the First Amendment
 - a. protects the right of individuals to say anything they want, in any location and at time that they choose.
 - b. allows individuals to say what they want as long as a majority of citizens do not find the ideas expressed to be objectionable.
 - c. gives the highest level of protection to political speech.
 - d. pertains only to the spoken word and not to symbolic expression.

14. Which constitutional protection could have been violated if a police officer, without a warrant or probable cause, broke into a person's apartment in an attempt to find a weapon that might have been used in a crime?
 - a. the right to bare arms.
 - b. the protection against unreasonable search and seizure.
 - c. the prohibition against the taking of private property for public use, without just compensation.
 - d. the right to be confronted by adverse witnesses.
15. The U.S. Supreme Court
 - a. has always required the states to abide by each and every provision of the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution
 - b. has gradually required the states to abide by most of the provisions of the first ten amendments to the constitution.
 - c. requires that only the national government abide by the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
16. Americans are least supportive of
 - a. political equality.
 - b. legal equality.
 - c. equality of results.
 - d. equality of opportunity.
17. In its Plessy v. Ferguson decision the US Supreme Court
 - a. established the separate-but-equal doctrine.
 - b. promoted the integration of public schools in the South.
 - c. promoted the integration of public schools in the North.
 - d. declared that laws mandating separate accommodations on trains for different races was unconstitutional.
18. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the state and local governments in the South immediately desegregated the public schools.
 - a. true
 - b. false
19. In the early years of the United States, voters in general did not have to be
 - a. white.
 - b. well educated.
 - c. property owners.
 - d. male.
20. The 15th Amendment, which declares that a citizen's right to vote should not be denied or abridged because of race,
 - a. was the main achievement of Dr. Martin Luther King's political work.
 - b. did not prevent Southern states from passing laws which for many years effectively deprived African American citizens of the right to vote.
 - c. effectively ended all voting barriers for African American citizens from reconstruction to the present day.

21. Which act of Congress prohibited discrimination by race in public accommodations and employment?
 - a. the Equal Rights Amendment of 1972
 - b. the Missouri Compromise of 1820
 - c. the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
 - d. the Voting Rights Act of 1965
22. Political ideology is
 - a. not relevant in modern America.
 - b. the collective view of the public on a given issue or set of issues.
 - c. not something that can be studied through opinion polls.
 - d. a well-developed set of views that guides thinking about politics.
23. Generally, conservatives would be more likely to favor government regulation of business than liberals.
 - a. true
 - b. false
24. Agents of political socialization include
 - a. families
 - b. schools
 - c. the media
 - d. all of the above.
25. If used on an opinion survey, which of the following would be an example of a leading question?
 - a. Which presidential candidate did you vote for in the last 2004 election?
 - b. Recognizing that no public investment gives society a greater return as investments in education, do you favor increasing funding for public schools?
 - c. Are you a regular voter?
 - d. Are you in favor or opposed to increased spending on defense?
26. If a talk show host conducted a poll by asking his or her listeners to call in and state their view on a particular issue, this would violate which principle of scientific polling?
 - a. Polls should require respondents to write their responses down, and not merely provide oral responses.
 - b. All scientific polling must be conducted by individuals with a graduate degree in public opinion polling and generally talk show hosts do not have such a degree.
 - c. It is not a valid way of obtaining a representative sample.
 - d. To obtain a valid estimate of public opinion on a political issue, one must conduct an exit poll, otherwise non-voter's views will be mixed together with voter's views.
27. Candidate A is the choice of 45 percent of individuals in a pre-election poll. Candidate B is the choice of 49 percent of individuals in that same poll and 6 percent of voters are undecided. The margin of error for the poll is 5%.
 - a. We can conclude that candidate B is ahead of candidate A.
 - b. We can conclude that the race is really a tie at this point.
 - c. We can conclude that the margin of error makes the result too close to call.
 - d. We can conclude the pollsters made some sort of sampling error because the difference between the support for each candidate is smaller than the margin of error.

28. The _____ effect would explain an individual changing their perspective on an issue as they went through different stages of their life.
- generational
 - life-cycle
29. By choosing a random sample a surveyor
- eliminates bias by making sure that the people surveyed provide only objective facts and not their subjective viewpoints on issues.
 - ensures that the survey questions are not ambiguous.
 - can obtain a sample of individuals that is generally representative of the population being studied.
 - ensures that there will not be any problems with the wording of the survey questions.
30. The main reason for structural (commercial) bias in the media is
- over-regulation by the government.
 - the need for media corporations to make money.
 - more media corporations are owned by Republicans than Democrats.
 - the constraints placed on freedom of the press by the Supreme Court.
31. Which of the following is the most accurate description of media ownership?
- the ownership of broadcast, cable, and print media has become increasingly concentrated in recent years.
 - most broadcast networks, television stations and newspapers are family owned businesses.
 - the ownership of broadcast, cable, and print media has become dramatically less concentrated in recent years.
32. When Political Scientists use systematic methods to identify and measure certain types of words, phrases, and stories in particular media sources over a prescribed period of time, they are using a research method called
- participant observation.
 - public opinion polling.
 - content analysis.
 - intensive interviews.
33. Americans are least likely to get their news from
- television
 - radio
 - newspapers
 - Americans use all three about equally as news sources.
34. Which of the following is an organization that seeks to elect candidates to office under its label and, once elected, to run the government?
- an interest group
 - a political party
 - political action committee
 - iron triangle

35. At the national level, is one of the two major parties more liberal than the other?
- Yes, the Republican party.
 - Yes, the Democratic party.
 - No, both parties are about the same.
36. Of all the interest groups, those that represent _____ are the most numerous.
- governmental interests.
 - the interests of unions and their members.
 - the interests of business and trade associations, and corporations.
 - the interests of professional associations.
37. An example of indirect interest group lobbying involves
- nominating individuals for elective office.
 - lobbyists visiting with member of Congress in their offices in Washington DC.
 - putting ads on TV to try to convince members of the public to write their members of Congress in support of the interest group's policy position.
 - filing a friend of the court brief in a legal case.
38. During a general election, on a single ballot, a voter chooses a Democrat for president, a Republican for governor, and a Republican to represent her in the U.S. Senate.
- The voter cast a split ticket vote.
 - The voter is a straight ticket voter.
 - The voter violated the law and her ballot will not be counted.
 - the voter's choices are extremely unusual during a time of party dealignment.
39. In a closed primary state
- any registered voter could vote in the Republican or Democratic primary.
 - only registered Republicans may vote in the Republican primary, and only registered Democrats may vote in the Democratic primary.
 - you can decide on the day of the primary in which party's primary you will participate.
 - the caucus convention system replaces the primary.
40. Voter turnout
- is generally higher in the United States than in most other Western Industrial Democracies.
 - tends to be highest among low income individuals because they want to see the most changes in government policy.
 - tends to be lower among the youngest individuals eligible to vote than among the middle age population.
 - tends to be low among upper income individuals who are generally content with how things are going.
41. To win in the Electoral College, a presidential candidate must win
- two-thirds majority of the electoral votes.
 - a majority of the popular votes.
 - more popular votes than any other single candidate.
 - a majority of the electoral votes.

42. Originally under the U.S. Constitution, members of the U.S. Senate were
 - a. chosen by the people in direct popular elections.
 - b. chosen by state legislatures.
 - c. appointed by the president and confirmed by the Supreme Court.
 - d. chosen by each state's governor.
43. The Reapportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives
 - a. takes place every ten years based on results of the US Census.
 - b. has resulted in more seats for states in the South and West in recent years.
 - c. influences the number of electors states have in the electoral college.
 - d. all of the above.
44. What does the federal bureaucracy refer to?
 - a. the legislative branch
 - b. the judicial branch
 - c. the executive branch
 - d. the congress
45. Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?
 - a. the president
 - b. the Congress
 - c. the Supreme Court
 - d. the trial courts
46. Conference committees are
 - a. permanent and involve members from both the House and the Senate
 - b. temporary and are created to take up an issue that falls between the jurisdiction of existing committees, to highlight an issue, or to investigate a particular problem.
 - c. permanent and have the power to write and propose legislation.
 - d. temporary, involve members from both houses of Congress, and are charged with reaching a compromise on legislation once it has been passed by both the House and the Senate.
47. The term for
 - a. members of the House and members of the Senate is 4 years.
 - b. members of the House is 2 years and for members of the Senate is 4 years.
 - c. members of the House is 2 years and for members of the Senate is 6 years.
 - d. members of the House is 4 years and for members of the Senate is 6 years.
48. The chairs of the committees of the current Congress
 - a. include both Republicans and Democrats, but more Republicans since they are in the majority in both chambers.
 - b. are all Republican in the House and are all Democrats in the Senate.
 - c. are all Democrats.
 - d. are all Republicans.
49. Currently, which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives?
 - a. the Republican party
 - b. the Democratic party

50. Currently, which party has the most members in the United States Senate?
- the Republican party.
 - the Democratic party.
51. In the United States, today,
- there is no limit on the number of terms that members of the U.S. Congress can serve, and there is no limit on the number of terms a U.S. President can serve.
 - there is a limit on the number of terms that members of the U.S. Congress can serve, but there is no limit on the number of terms that a U.S. President can serve.
 - there is no limit on the number of terms that members of the U.S. Congress can serve, but there is a limit on the number of terms that a U.S. President can serve.
 - there is a limit on the number of terms that members of the U.S. Congress can serve, and there is a limit on the number of terms that a U.S. President can serve.
52. Which of the following presidents is associated with the greatest expansion of the executive branch of government?
- Thomas Jefferson
 - Abraham Lincoln
 - Woodrow Wilson
 - Franklin Roosevelt
53. The president's appointment power
- includes the appointment of the leadership of Congress.
 - is essentially absolute.
 - requires that his appointees be confirmed by the Senate.
 - does not extend to federal judges.
54. The U.S. Constitution gives the president the power to declare war.
- true
 - false
55. Civil servants
- are political appointees of the president and the president can easily fire them.
 - lose their jobs when the president leaves office.
 - make up only a very small proportion of the total federal government workforce.
 - do not receive their jobs by presidential appointment and cannot easily be fired by the president.
56. How are members of the U.S. Supreme Court chosen?
- They are elected.
 - They are nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate.
 - They are nominated by the House of Representatives and approved by the President.
 - they are chosen from among and through a secret ballot of all the federal appeals court judges.
57. *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) established which of the following?
- the doctrine of states rights.
 - the principle of "separate but equal."
 - the power of judicial review.
 - the doctrine of national supremacy.

58. It was very important to the framers of the constitution that
- judges' decisions, while separate from the legislative and executive branches, would be strongly influenced by popular opinion.
 - ultimately the President could remove judges from the federal bench, if those judges' decisions contradicted the President's understanding of the law or the U.S. Constitution.
 - judges would carefully avoid making decisions that contradicted popular viewpoints.
 - there be an independent judiciary in which judges could make unpopular decisions without the fear that they would lose their jobs.
59. A court of appeals
- tends to focus on issues of guilt and innocence.
 - is usually the first court to hear a case.
 - must ignore previous judicial decisions that considered similar cases to avoid biasing their decision on the current case.
 - will review relevant court precedents when deciding a case.
60. Which provides a better description of social science research?
- A researcher lays out one or more hypotheses and gathers data that can test the validity of those hypotheses.
 - A researcher takes a position and tries to find accurate and timely information to support that position.
 - Evidence which contradicts a researcher's original hypothesis can be safely ignored if a thorough enough job went into the development of the hypothesis.
 - Only research which ends up confirming a hypothesis is of any value in furthering our knowledge.
61. Which of the following is the better example of a normative question?
- Are more students required to take civics classes in high school now than they were in 1950?
 - How much do Americans know about their government?
 - Do American women or men know more about the workings of our government?
 - How much should Americans know about their government?
62. When a social science researcher begins investigating a question of interest
- it is important to review the research that has been conducted on the topic by other researchers.
 - it is best if they ignore previous research in the area so they won't go into the topic with preconceived notions of what they will find.
 - it is unnecessary to consult previous research done on the topic because the world is changing so fast these days, previous research will never be relevant.
 - it is important for that person to avoid studying any topic that has already been studied by others.
63. Which of the two tables on the last page of this booklet would you use to test the hypothesis that gender has an influence on one's presidential vote decision.
- Table A
 - Table B

64. Based on the information you can find in the tables on the last page, which of the following is an accurate statement?
- a. 39.5% of males voted for Gore.
 - b. 56.1% of those who voted for Gore were females.
 - c. 60.5% of females voted for Gore.
 - d. 56.1% of female voters voted for Gore.
65. Which of the following statements is supported by the data on Tables A & B on the last page of this question booklet?
- a. In this sample men were slightly less likely than women to vote for Bush.
 - b. Oddly enough, among this sample, a larger percent voted for Nader than Bush.
 - c. Gender does not seem to have had any influence on voting in this sample.
 - d. In this sample, women were more likely than men to vote for Gore.

Table A: Presidential Vote in 2000 by Sex (from NES, 2000)

		SEX		
PRES VOTE2		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
	GORE	233	357	590
		45.1%	56.1%	51.2%
	BUSH	264	266	530
		51.1%	41.8%	46.0%
	NADER	20	13	33
		3.9%	2.0%	2.9%
	Missing	273	381	654
TOTAL	517	636	1153	
	100.0%	100.0%		

Table B: Presidential Vote in 2000 by Sex (from NES, 2000)

		SEX		
PRES VOTE2		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
	GORE	233	357	590
		39.5%	60.5%	100.0%
	BUSH	264	266	530
		49.8%	50.2%	100.0%
	NADER	20	13	33
		60.6%	39.4%	100.0%
	Missing	273	381	654
TOTAL	517	636	1153	
	44.8%	55.2%		

APPENDIX B: ASSESSMENT RESULTS FOR THE MULTIPLE CHOICE ITEMS*

Outcome 1: Students will demonstrate knowledge of diverse principles that explain human behavior.

Outcome 2: Students will apply the methods of the social sciences.

Question		spring 06	spring 06	fall 06	fall 06
#	Topic	Pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
		% correct	% correct	% correct	% correct
1	Civic Virtue	85%	95%	79%	97%
2	Representation	71%	91%	79%	94%
3	Enlightenment	45%	71%	46%	73%
4	Bill of Rights	78%	90%	81%	87%
5	Articles of Confederation	45%	75%	42%	76%
6	Majority Rule & Minority Rights	54%	83%	62%	87%
7	Checks and balances	80%	84%	76%	87%
8	Anti-Federalists	22%	74%	22%	64%
9	<i>Federalist Papers</i>	27%	82%	24%	83%
10	Federalism - National powers	65%	78%	69%	82%
11	Federalism - State powers	82%	96%	84%	91%
12	Individual Liberties	34%	86%	35%	73%
13	Freedom of Speech	21%	48%	19%	52%
14	Search and Seizure	91%	97%	93%	98%
15	Incorporation of Bill of Rights	9%	50%	5%	35%
16	Types of Equality	24%	70%	25%	44%
17	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>	42%	70%	30%	81%
18	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	66%	89%	67%	89%
19	Voting Rights in early years	88%	89%	80%	
20	15th Amendment	68%	83%	53%	78%
21	Civil Rights Act of 1964	53%	73%	45%	67%
22	Ideology	50%	70%	43%	68%
23	Government Regulation	41%	74%	39%	58%
24	Political Socialization	86%	91%	75%	98%
25	Survey question wording	51%	77%	41%	66%
26	Sampling - applied	50%	85%	51%	81%
27	Margin of Error	58%	72%	53%	66%
28	Political Socialization	59%	72%	58%	93%
29	Sampling - general	50%	81%	44%	85%
30	Commercial Media Bias	50%	71%	40%	78%
31	Media ownership	64%	86%	59%	84%

*In the spring semester of 2006, all questions from the pretest appeared on in class tests. In the middle of the fall semester of 2006, a decision was made to reduce the number of pretest questions that faculty would need to be incorporate into their regular exams to 19. Some faculty had already included more than the 19 & in those cases the results are included here also.

(continued on next page)

Question		spring 06	spring 06	fall 06	fall 06
#	Topic	Pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
		% correct	% correct	% correct	% correct
32	Content Analysis	63%	79%	60%	94%
33	Most common news source	24%	61%	20%	23%
34	Political party	71%	85%	71%	67%
35	Party and Ideology	68%	85%	71%	
36	Most numerous interest groups	37%	70%	33%	32%
37	Promotion of group interests	48%	87%	35%	78%
38	Split Ticket Voting	76%	97%	77%	
39	Closed primary	29%	81%	28%	76%
40	Voting Behavior	74%	94%	64%	90%
41	Electoral College	42%	66%	41%	56%
42	Original way to select Senators	14%	62%	13%	47%
43	Reapportionment	46%	72%	40%	
44	Federal bureaucracy	12%	54%	16%	
45	determination of constitutionality	70%	90%	70%	
46	Conference Committees	17%	66%	16%	68%
47	Congressional terms of office	29%	81%	20%	41%
48	Party Organization of Congress	4%	31%	3%	32%
49	Party in majority in US House	76%	89%	72%	
50	Party in majority in US Senate	62%	78%	60%	
51	Term Limits	70%	78%	57%	
52	New Deal Expansion of FedGovt	26%	78%	26%	67%
53	Presidential Appointment Power	57%	86%	43%	85%
54	Power to Declare War	37%	70%	40%	
55	Civil Service	22%	60%	16%	61%
56	Choosing Supreme Court Justices	66%	92%	63%	93%
57	<i>Marbury v. Madison</i>	23%	73%	20%	60%
58	Judicial Independence	41%	81%	27%	67%
59	Court of Appeals	28%	63%	27%	51%
60	Research Design	40%	68%	23%	76%
61	Normative vs. Empirical	15%	66%	12%	32%
62	literature review	47%	74%	42%	83%
63	Hypothesis testing	45%	79%	32%	
64	Interpreting data in Tables	24%	76%	14%	52%
65	Interpreting data in Tables	46%	85%	49%	87%

Graphical Representation of the Assessment Results for Outcomes 1 & 2

Figure 1: Percent of Students who Responded Correctly to Questions about Political Concepts (Spring 2006)

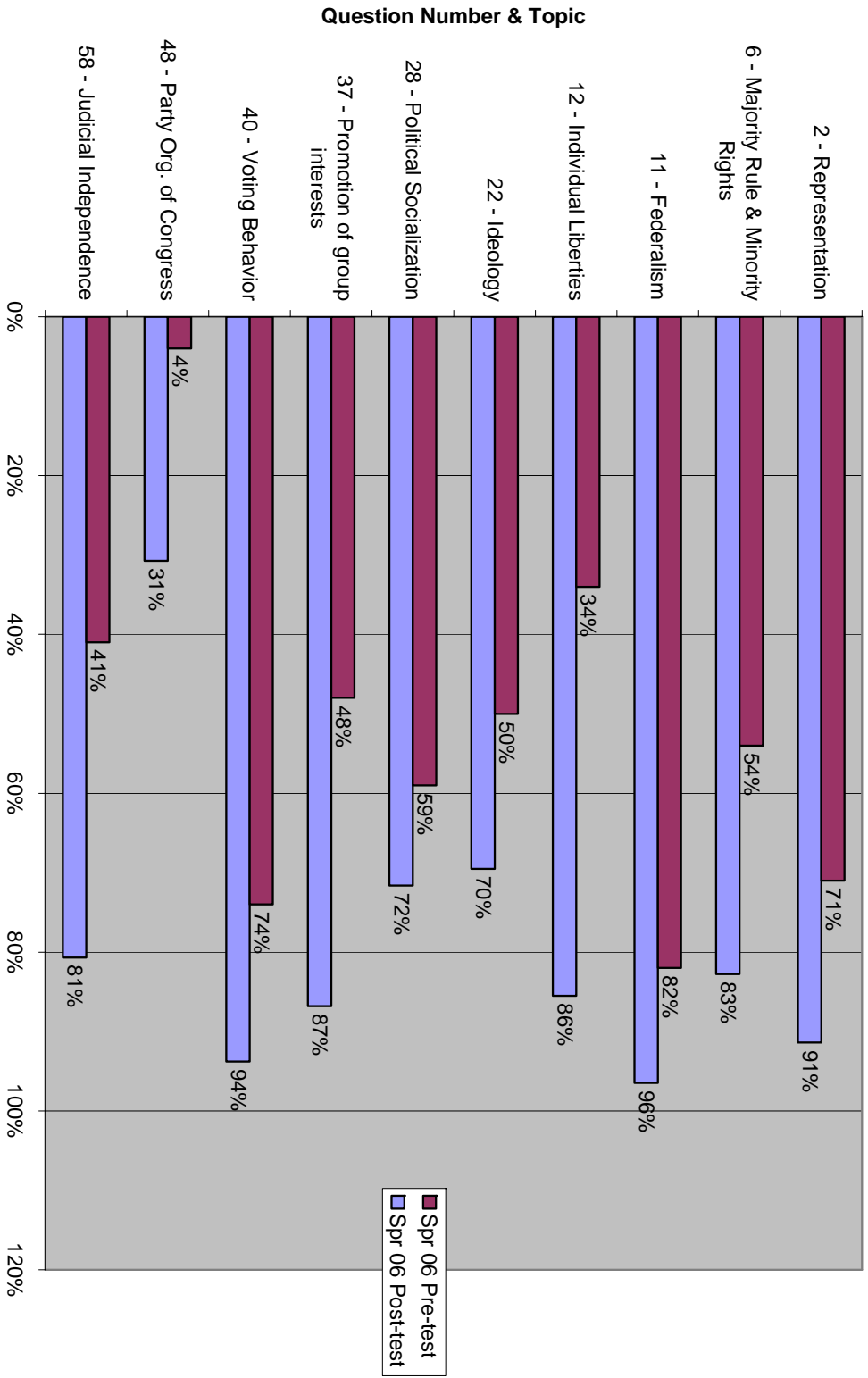


Figure 2: Percent of Students Who Responded Correctly to Questions About Political Concepts

(Fall 2006)

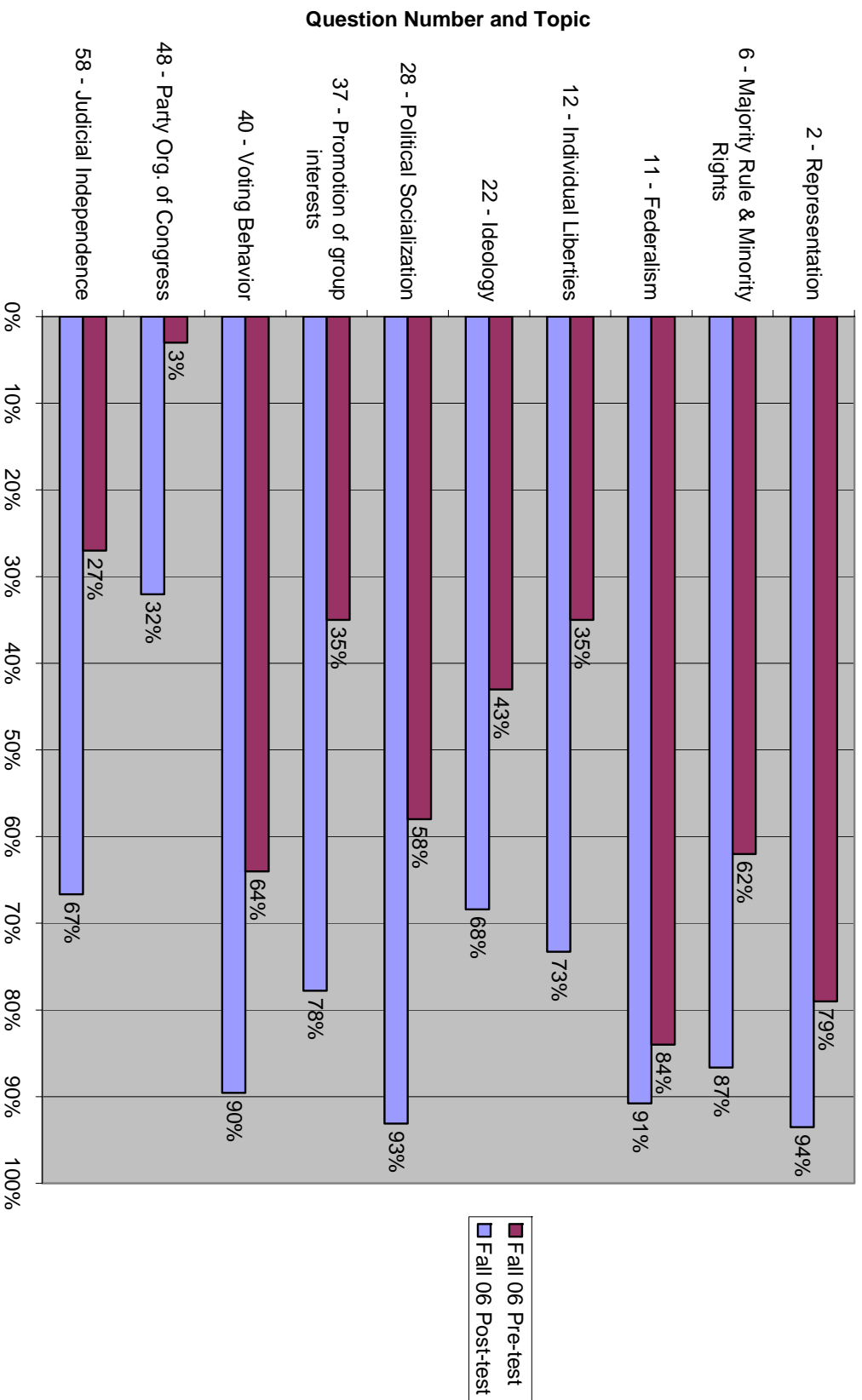


Figure 3: Percent of Students Who Responded Correctly to Questions about Research Methods (Spring 2006)

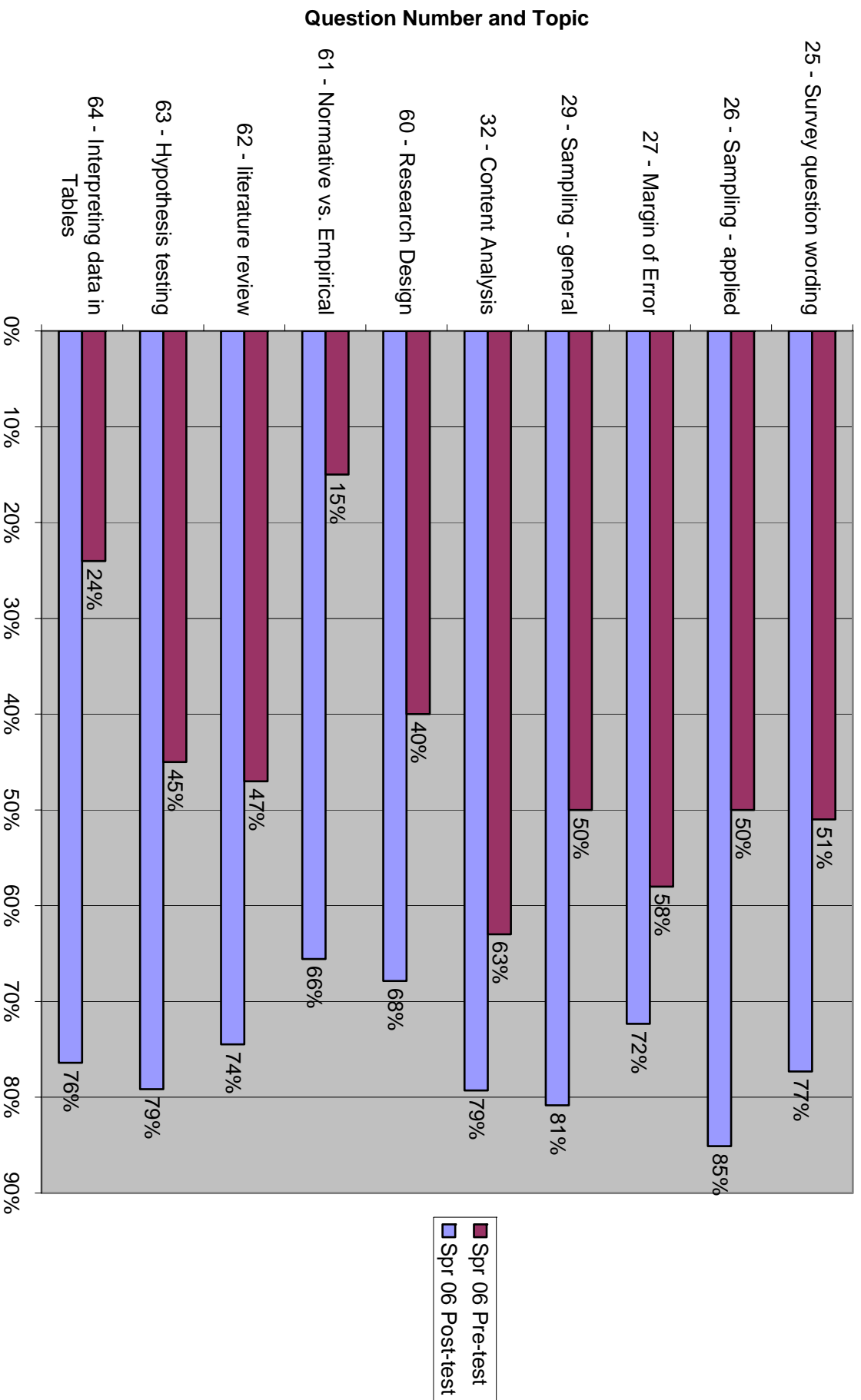
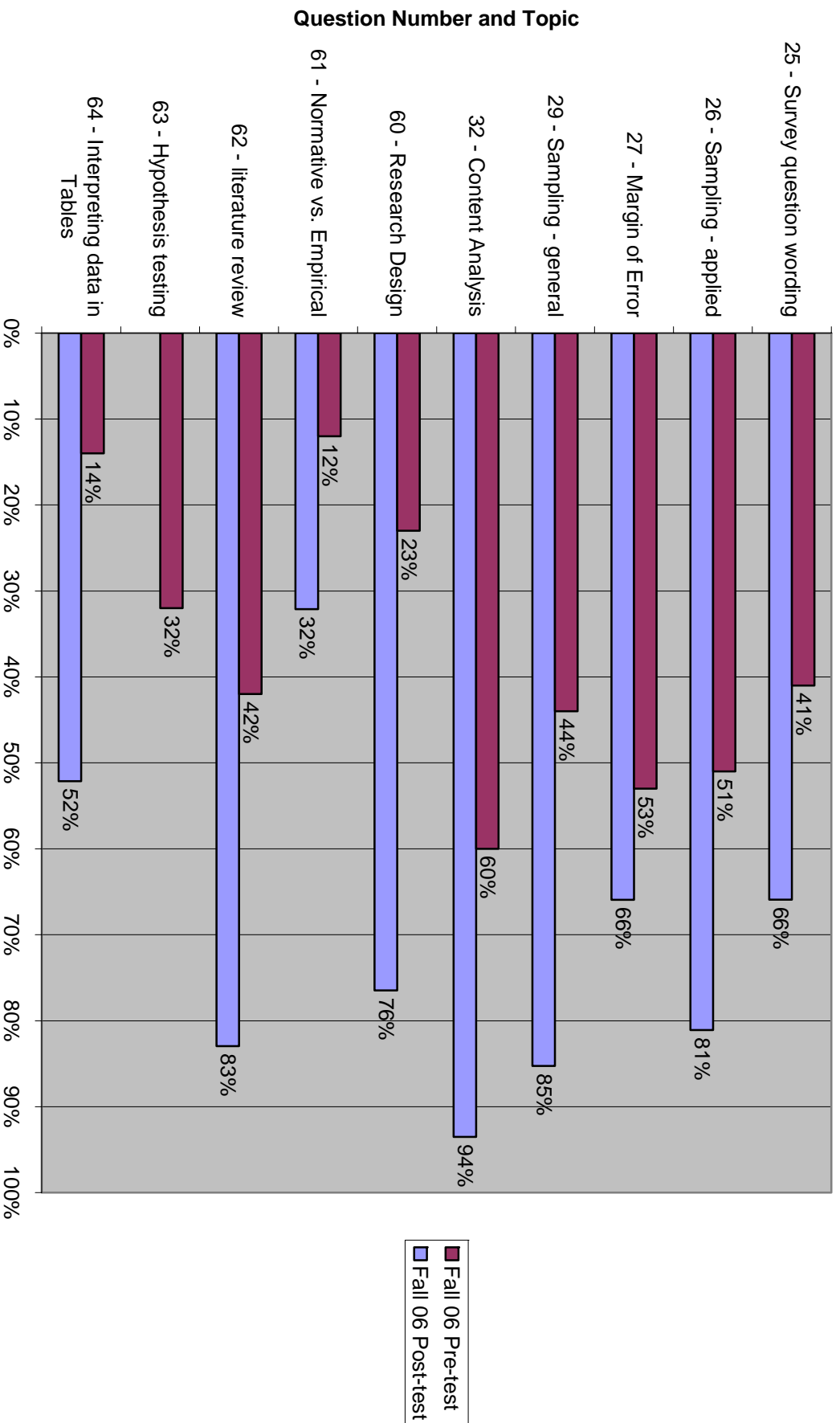


Figure 4: Percent of Students Who Responded Correctly to Questions about Research Methods (Fall 2006)



APPENDIX C: WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT TO ASSESS THE THIRD OUTCOME

(Outcome 3 - Students will identify and analyze human activities and/or institutions in the broad variety of human contexts within past and/or present time.)

Political Science 114: Written Assignment

The purpose of this assignment is for students to write a critical analysis of two competing perspectives on a specific issue in American Politics.

You are to read the two contrasting perspectives presented in the readings and submit an analysis of the articles. In that analysis you should do the following:

First, determine the basic position or argument of each of the authors. What conclusion does each author want the reader to make after finishing each article?

Second, show how each author supports his or her main ideas. How does each author develop his or her argument? What types of evidence are used to support the arguments? How does the evidence used compare to what you have learned about this topic in class and the textbook?

Third, evaluate the articles. This means comparing the relative strengths and weaknesses of each perspective. How convincing was each author? You should not just state your conclusions, but also give a reasoned explanation for why you reached the conclusions that you did about each article.

The paper is to be 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages in length. Since clarity will be taken into account when grading, be sure you carefully proofread your paper before handing it in. Papers must be posted to www.turnitin.com, which is a website that checks for plagiarism.

GRADING RUBRIC FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

Criteria for Evaluating Political Science 114 Written Assignment

Criteria:

- 1) The basic position of each author is accurately and clearly identified.
- 2) The supporting arguments made by the authors of each article are clearly, accurately and completely stated.
- 3) The evidence used by each author is clearly and fully summarized, and student compares evidence used by the authors with information learned about this topic in class or the textbook.
- 4) The strengths and weaknesses of the two articles are evaluated and conclusions are presented about how convincing each author was. This conclusion should not just indicate the judgment reached, but also the reasons for reaching it.

Evaluation:

Excellent	(meets all 4 criteria using standard, formal prose)
Good	(3 out of 4 criteria)
Adequate	(2 out of 4 criteria)
Marginal	(1 out of 4 criteria)
Unacceptable	(0 criteria)

Papers must be written using standard, formal prose. Essays that contain more than 3-4 spelling, grammar, punctuation and/or usage errors per page will result in a lowering of the evaluation of the assignment by one category.

ASSESSMENT RESULTS FOR THE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT

	Spring 2006 (N=186)	Fall 2006 (N=237)
Excellent (meets all 4 criteria using standard, formal prose)	41%	24%
Good (3 out of 4 criteria)	31%	32%
Adequate (2 out of 4 criteria)	17%	27%
Marginal (1 out of 4 criteria)	3%	9%
Unacceptable (0 criteria)	7%	7%