



## Sustainable Management | 2015-2016 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

**Competency** being assessed: Number 3 on the matrix: “Students will be able to critically appraise environmental, energy, and resource policies and to develop a capacity to think critically and creatively about alternative policies.”

**Method** of Assessment: Review of the written work submitted for the course as well as a global assessment of 16 discussion forums throughout the semester. The written work consists of three short (2 pp.) critique papers on selected course readings, which are designed to build a capacity to think critically, and the research paper submitted at the end of the semester (15 to 25 pages). The major paper provides a suitable way to assess students’ capacity to think critically about existing policies and programs as well as to creatively analyze alternatives to existing policies and programs. The discussion forums typically included about 200 separate comments by the 21 students enrolled in the course (two of whom did not complete all work course work). These comments addressed one or more of three to four questions posed for each week’s reading. Each of these questions calls for students to read the assigned work, generally thematic book chapters, and to respond to how well the author or authors make their case; the quality of the evidence presented; the practical utility of the analysis for problem solving at the local, state or federal level; and alternative ways to consider the problem under consideration and possible solutions. In most weeks, the questions focused on environmental, energy, and resource policies and alternatives, or on decision-making processes in government at all levels, including citizen involvement in decision making.

### Examples:

Discussion forums:

(1) One question in the first week’s readings is this one: “One part of the framework introduced in Environmental Policy and Politics focuses on risk assessment or risk analysis, that is, on identifying and measuring the risks to public health and the environment posed by various conditions or exposures—whether climate change, nuclear waste, toxic chemicals, or radon in one’s home. Do you think the public and policymakers understand these risk concepts fairly well? If not, what might be done to improve understanding?”

(2) Another question from the fifth session includes this question: “As the readings indicate, the United States relies heavily on a regulatory or “command-and-control” approach to environmental protection policy. Is this approach working well enough to maintain it over the next several decades, or should we consider alternative approaches, either to replace the current policies or to supplement them?”

(3) A question from the 12th week: “Chapter 5 in Portney discusses citizen engagement and participation in decision making as part of seeking sustainability goals. What do you think it takes for

successful involvement of citizens in such decision making, that is, in decisions on land use, transportation, industrial siting actions, water conservation, and the like? What kinds of problems might such intensive citizen involvement create for cities seeking to move toward sustainability?"

These are typical questions in the 14 discussion forums, generally one each week except for the two weeks where students worked on their research papers.

**Results:** To be reported in number of students successful and number of students unsuccessful.

Participation in the forums was extensive. As noted, a typical week of about 150 to 200 responses, or roughly 9-10 comments per student per week. The vast majority of these did precisely what was expected. **We can put that at about 90 percent or about 17 of the 19 students who completed the course.** They answered the question by reference to a specific course reading, often quoting the source. Typically, another 8 to 10 students would comment on someone else's response. So the purpose of the forums was met to a high degree by nearly all students. Discussion forum grades reflected the number of comments for each student for each week, the quality of the comments, and the number of other student comments that were read each week. Forum grades generally were very high, reflecting the degree to which students met these expectations. Most students received grades of 80 to 100 percent for each week's forum. About half had nearly perfect scores of 100 percent throughout the semester.

Short analytical papers: Here too the expectations were met at a high degree. The overwhelming majority (**90 percent plus, or 17 out of 19 students**) had grades of A or A- on each of the three short papers, meaning that they demonstrated a capacity to identify the author's line of argument and the evidence or reasoning behind it, and to critically appraise the chapter.

Research paper. I asked for an outline of the paper in the 5th week of the semester, and students had the opportunity to submit a draft paper one week before the final paper was due. The papers varied, of course, in their scope and polish, but nearly all met the expectation to critically appraise public policies in the field, to consider alternative policies and programs, and to bring to bear on this analysis a range of pertinent information drawn from government reports, books, and peer-reviewed articles. Most also demonstrated a keen capacity to think creatively about how to improve problem solving in the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and government. All but a few of the papers received grades of A or A-, and those that did not reflected a lack of time due to family or work obligations at the end of the semester. **Out of the 19 students who completed all work in the course, 18 submitted papers of sufficient quality to meet the standard reflected in the learning outcome competency. That is a 95 percent rate** of satisfactory performance in terms of the learning outcome.

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected?

**Possible Improvements:** Not that many necessary given the highly positive results. I already provide an opportunity for students to submit draft papers, which means that the final papers are better than they otherwise would be. But about half of the class did not avail themselves of this opportunity. The difference was evident in the final papers. The discussion forums and the short papers were very successful. The forums possibly benefited from the new video introductions this

year to each of the sessions in the course, which helped to define the topic and put it into the larger context of sustainable management. Those videos were filmed in the summer of 2015.

**Instructor Comments:** As noted, I was very satisfied this semester with the quality of discussion forum postings and replies, and with the short papers and final papers. Some students invariably take on more than they can handle in light of family and work responsibilities, and this shows up from time to time, and especially at the end of the semester.