To: Dr. Carlota Ocampo, Associate Provost, Assessment

Re: Program Assessment for International Security Studies Program

 At your request, two peer reviewers agreed to evaluate the assessment of Trinity’s graduate program in International Security Studies, submitted for review some time ago. The materials for review were brief and incomplete, but underscored concerns about whether the program is, in fact, achieving its goals. Looking forward, we have a number of questions and suggestions that we hope will be helpful to the program faculty, as the degree finds a new institutional home in Business and Graduate Studies.

 The report included the following sections: a short (four line) description of the ISS program, a list of expectations of what students who obtain the ISS degree should be able to do, a list of competencies to be obtained from study within the program, a brief description of requirements, and an evaluation of the program that notes failure of students to meet these competencies, leading to the identification of six major areas of weakness. We also saw a list of the main courses offered within the IS program, which includes a brief notation about the kinds of assignments central to each course. We should note that, in addition to being limited in scope, the assessment contained numerous stylistic errors, occasionally leading to an unfortunate lack of clarity about the point to be conveyed. We also noticed that many of the identified competencies really seemed to be further elaboration of what graduates of the program should be expected to know and do.

 We recommend that a more comprehensive review of the ISS program be initiated as soon as possible and should include the following components:

1. A characterization of how the graduate program in International Security Studies reflects the mission statement of Trinity Washington University and the particular institutional goals established for the School of Professional Studies and the School of Business and Graduate Studies.
2. An expanded explanation of the professional applications of the degree, including clarification about possible career paths, such as “political/economic specialists, threat specialists, and foreign area specialists.”
3. A clear statement of the key program goals in International Security Studies.
4. A precise definition of the objectives to be achieved through the pursuit of the program goals.
5. An examination of how the foundational graduate program courses contribute to the attainment of these objectives.
6. A more fully elaborated and coherent account of the knowledge outcomes to be gained through completion of the foundational program courses.
7. A more fully elaborated and coherent presentation of the skills and competencies students will achieve through the completion of the program.
8. A comparison of the design of Trinity’s graduate program in International Security Studies with that of others offered in the field, especially at cohort and regional schools. In addition, the assessment should demonstrate that the program design meets the professional standards in the field, with reference to guidelines established by the relevant professional organizations.
9. An introduction of the teaching faculty in the program, including appraisals of their professional qualifications and of their scholarly agendas and public activities. This section of the report could address whether the available faculty have the expertise required to sustain the program and whether staffing needs to be increased or diversified.
10. Copies of syllabi for each of the required foundational courses in the program, clearly noting the central features of the class and the expectations that must be met to complete it successfully.
11. A discussion of the data used to support the conclusions of the assessment, including how it was collected and whether it has any evident limits.
12. An examination of the degree to which technological resources support the program’s needs.
13. An examination of the degree to which library resources are adequate for graduate student research projects.
14. Information about the career opportunities and post graduation experiences of alumni/alumnae that indicate whether the program has been successful and effective in the achievement of its goals.

 Supporting materials of the type noted above will provide evidence for a deeper, fuller analysis of the program, in turn leading to stronger recommendations about how the program can be improved. The extant program evaluation identified serious problems related to faculty, who did not have the requisite backgrounds in their teaching fields and failed to recommend appropriate professional texts or introduce their students to central theories in international security. Also, the program was unable to offer courses on some of the most significant issues in contemporary international security studies. As a result, students in the program proved unable to demonstrate basic research skills, leading to inadequate performances in the Capstone/Thesis course. Even such basic matters as mastery of appropriate professional citation and bibliographical practices were difficult for students, some of whom complained that they had not learned these forms, had no knowledge of grading standards and had received little, if any, feedback from their instructors about their work. It may be worth asking whether teaching these subjects and skills requires a different balance between full-time permanent faculty and part-time adjunct faculty who are primarily career practitioners. Clearly, these are urgent problems that need to be addressed as soon as possible if Trinity’s Master’s in International Security Studies is going to continue to attract students and prepare them well for the careers they hope to enter.