

## POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSESSMENT

March 22, 2011

### **Political Science Program Catalog Description**

The Political Science Program emphasizes both the study of political science as a discipline and the active, practical participation of students in the political process. In addition to course work, students participate in a wide variety of internships and fieldwork classes in Washington, D.C., to learn politics through direct observation and involvement.

The major in political science is designed to help students effectively fulfill their expanding roles in public life. Knowledge of governmental affairs in combination with communication and research skills can open a wide vista of challenging opportunities. Trinity looks to its political science majors to provide the much-needed dedication and leadership qualities aimed at achieving an enriched and more just society.

Political science provides students with grounding in several fields including American government, comparative political systems, international relations, political theory, and field experience afforded by Trinity's location in the nation's capital. This resource serves students in two ways: first, through utilization of the city's political and governmental institutions as learning laboratories and second, by providing students with professional contacts and networking opportunities well before they graduate. In addition, political science majors can combine a thorough grounding in political science theory and methodology with a self-directed focus on selected public policy topics and/or with multidisciplinary course selections through the general education curriculum and complementary courses in other disciplines.

An analysis of the many aspects of leadership as well as the concept itself is woven into every political science course. The Political Science Program is also sensitive to the needs of women not only through gender-specific courses but also through many other courses that address issues and processes of special significance to women. The comparative politics sequence and international relations courses in particular provide an essential resource for the development of multicultural awareness.

### **Political Science Program-Level Goals and Competencies**

Goal 1. Understand and explain political structures, institutions and actors in the U.S. and other countries. [POLS 101, 211, 231, 277, 301, 305, 311, 341, 363, 403]

Competencies:

- Describe the operation of checks and balances and separation of powers in the American political system
- Describe functional theories of government structures
- Describe systems theories of government structures
- Describe the role of legal systems in political structures
- Analyze government structures in terms of citizen participation, capabilities, and values

**Goal 2.** Understand and explain the relationships among international actors, with particular focus on patterns of conflict and cooperation. [POLS 241, 341, 343, 363, 431, 443]

Competencies:

- Define and explain the major terms, concepts and theories used in the study of international relations
- Identify the major actors in the international system
- **Identify the factors that have contributed to the profound inequalities among world societies**
- Analyze the major issues that currently dominate international politics

**Goal 3.** Understand and explain the sources and applications of political values. [POLS 201, 275, 299, 313, 363, 471]

Competencies:

- Describe the political values underlying the U.S. Constitution and its Amendments
- Describe the political values underlying various theoretical and hypothetical political structures
- Describe the relationships between and among private and public sector government institutions
- Analyze contemporary governance issues for expressions of political values

**Goal 4.** Develop effective oral and written forms of communication that acknowledge and articulate diverse political ideas and analyze and critique the arguments of others. [All courses, but with intense focus in the seminars: POLS 403, 405, 431, 443, 471]

Competencies:

- Develop written and oral presentations designed to demonstrate the competencies described in Goals 1 through 3
- Develop written and oral presentations in a variety of formats, e.g., briefings, summaries, abstracts, research papers
- Participate as effective members of small working groups
- Demonstrate the ability to critically think and communicate about ideas and issues

**Goal 5.** Develop and demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for effective participation in civic and political life. [POLS 101, 363, 365, 367, 369, 491]

Competencies:

- Develop an awareness of civic responsibilities and opportunities in a democratic setting
- Develop and demonstrate skills for participation in political campaigns and elections
- Develop and demonstrate skills in public opinion polling
- Develop and demonstrate the abilities required to participate in political advocacy

- Demonstrate the ability to successfully perform in a political internship
- Goal 6. Apply professional political skills through field work opportunities and internships. [POLS 365, 367, 369, 491]

Competencies:

- Obtain an approved political internship
- Design a political advocacy action plan
- Participate in a political campaign
- Participate as a political pollster

## Data

### Assessment for POLS 101 Politics, Power, and You: Democracy at the Crossroads

An assessment was conducted on **Goal One of the course--"to gain an introductory knowledge of the operation and structure of the U.S. governmental and political systems"** through the use of data comparing student performance on an intake assessment and an assessment after the students studied the material during the first part of the class.

The topics compared involved measuring students' understanding of two key concepts--**federalism and checks and balances** in the US constitutional system. The **intake assessment of 23 questions** was reviewed as a whole as well.

The results of the intake assessment made it clear that students were properly placed in an introductory class in American government. Only two students out of the 25 students who took the intake assessment got fewer than 10 questions wrong or left them blank.

There is also some evidence that students who did not understand the concepts of federalism and checks and balances coming into the class, better understood them six weeks into the semester. Fourteen students who left the federalism item blank on the intake assessment and 17 who left the checks and balances item blank on the intake assessment fully comprehended the concepts on their first exam. Two students understood federalism both before and after the course work and 6 understood checks and balances before and after. 7 students did not comprehend federalism either before or after the class work and two did not understand checks and balances on either assessment. It appears from this assessment that more class time will be devoted to the concept of federalism in the future

### Assessment for POLS 311 Constitutional Law

An assessment was conducted to determine whether students were better comprehending the case law in certain cases as opposed to others. Indeed in a class of ten students taking an examination of the case law studied in class, **9 out of the ten lost points on the first exam on the case of Marbury v. Madison** --with respect to the students' ability to explain the facts and opinion in the case. No other case was less understood. This outcome alerted the professor of the need to spend more time dissecting the details of this case in the future.

### Assessment for POLS 363 U. S. Intelligence Community and World Affairs (Spring 2011)

#### **Course Objectives**

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the changing contexts and content of United States intelligence structures and policies from the end of World War II to the present. (Exam #3)
- 2. Define and explain the types of intelligence used by the intelligence community and the methods by which each type is obtained. (Exam #1) See Program Goals #1 and #5.**
3. Describe the issues and challenges facing the United States intelligence community. (Exam #2)
4. Identify and utilize primary and secondary sources of information about the U.S. Intelligence community. (Final project)
5. Analyze and report on the functions and structure of a specific U.S. intelligence agency. (Final project)

Results from exam #1 (February 23, 2011) re course objective #2.

Questions: 25 possible points for each question.

1. **First**, identify each of the five major collection disciplines by acronym. **Second**, for each discipline, write out what the acronym means. **Third**, select one collection discipline and write two or three paragraphs that explain what it is, how it is carried out, and what role it plays in the intelligence process.

Mean Score=18.5      Media= 21.5      Mode=25      n=14

2. **Select 8** of the following acronyms and identify what each stands for. Your responses must be completely accurate for them to be considered correct. CIA; DIA; DHS; DOD; DOE; FBI; INR; NGA; NRO; NSA; NSC; ODNI; OSS

Mean Score=24      Median=25      Mode=25      n=24

3. **Select 10** of the following terms and define each of them. Your definition should clearly state what the term means and how it is used in the study of the intelligence process.

Terms: intelligence; politicized intelligence; groupthink; verification; priority creep; content analysis; cryptographers; noise versus signals; swarm ball; surveillance; reconnaissance; lead time; all-source intelligence; stovepipes problem; denial; deception; risk versus take; agent acquisition cycle

Mean Score=12      Median=16.75      Mode=16      n=16

4. **List the 17 members** of the U.S. intelligence community. Write out the complete name of each member.

Mean Score=21      Median=22.5      Mode=25      n=21

5. **List and briefly define the 7 stages** of the intelligence process described by Lowenthal.

Mean Score= 20      Median=21      Mode=23      n=20

These exam results can be compared with the data from the intake assessment for the course, which included responses to the following questions:

*#3 What does each of the following acronyms mean? HUMINT; SIGINT; GEOINT; MASINT; OSINT?*

This question reflects information required in question #1 from the exam. On the intake assessment (n=24), no student was able to define all of these acronyms, 4 were able to identify GEOINT, and 1 was able to identify HUMINT. On the exam they could recall the types of intelligence as well as define and describe them.

*#5 There are 17 agencies that are formally part of the U.S. intelligence community. List as many members (agencies) of the intelligence community as you can.*

This question asks for the same information as question #4 from the exam. On the intake assessment (n=24), the average score was 4.3 correct responses out of the possible 17. (Note: This does not reflect the wrong answers included on the intake assessment.)

### Assessment for POLS 241 Intro to International Relations (Fall 2010)

#### **Course Objectives**

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. identify the theme, main points, and types and quality of evidence for each reading;
2. summarize the content and meaning of each reading;
3. define and explain the major terms, concepts, and theories used in the study of international relations;
4. analyze international issues and behaviors using an international system framework;
5. identify the major actors in the international system;
6. identify and analyze the major issues that currently dominate international politics;
- 7. identify the factors that have contributed to the development of profound inequalities among world societies; and (Exam #2) See Program Goal #2**
8. identify and utilize primary and secondary research sources and websites.

Course goals # 7 re international inequality is addressed by Exam #2 questions:

In the Introduction to the *Penguin Atlas*, Dan Smith states, “despite progress on poverty reduction, inequality persists and the gap between the richest and poorest in the world shows little sign of narrowing.”

1. Using the information presented in the *Penguin Atlas* in the maps and the written descriptions, explain which areas of the world are the wealthiest and healthiest. What variables do the maps use to evaluate wealth and health? Provide some examples from the maps to support your answer.

2. In those areas NOT wealthy and healthy, describe what types of problems face the people living there, according to the Penguin maps. What variables do the Penguin maps use to identify and measure these problems? Provide some examples from the maps to support your answer.

3. Based on the maps and on the discussion in the *New York Times* article entitled, “Riches May Not Help Papua New Guinea,” how does the situation facing the people of Papua New Guinea reflect the relationship between a wealthy transnational corporation, such as ExxonMobil, on the one hand, and a poor region of the world, such as Papua New Guinea, on the other. Is Papua New Guinea likely to become a wealthy part of the world as a result of the energy resources they have? Why or why not?

The students’ grades demonstrated the degree to which this objective was reached. For exam # 2 (n=58, lecture 1=30 + lecture 2=28)

Lecture 1: Mean Score=81%

Lecture 2: Mean Score=85

## **Analysis**

The immediate analysis of each of the above cases is included in the presentation of the data.

## **Conclusion**

The primary question in any individual course is “Have the students achieved the objectives of the course?” The answer in each of the above cases is presented with the data.

What is very apparent in using outcome assessment of student performance is that the answer to the question of whether students have achieved the objectives of the course is more reliable and more methodologically manageable at the lower end of the learning taxonomy. It is certainly possible to measure higher levels of the taxonomy, e.g., analysis, synthesis, but that requires much more in the way of professional resources than those available to us in political science. With only two faculty members, one of whom also must be the program chair, and no institutional research staff or even work study students available to help, the coding of data to measure higher levels of the taxonomy is not possible.

Further, even if we can identify “further resources” to improve our course delivery, they are not available. Academic programs run with no resources beyond the minimum. In fact, resources that were recently available are no longer. In the Political Science Program the retirement of the third faculty member in the program several years ago has been addressed administratively by reducing the program faculty size through attrition.

If we had the resources and administrative support to do so, there should be an intake assessment of political science knowledge for all incoming freshmen, including an assessment of civic knowledge and international knowledge. At the end of the sophomore year, when the Gen Ed is completed, and at the end of the senior year students could be retested to provide the necessary comparative data. It would still be heavily weighted toward the lower end of the taxonomy. To assess student achievement at a higher level on the learning taxonomy, institutional research staff needs to be available to the program. With additional help, the regular collection of assessment data, including the the coding of essays, papers and other qualitative instruments, could be carried out.

K. McGinnis  
March 22, 2011