Response to CJUS Program Review

Summary of Review

The Criminal Justice (College of Arts and Sciences) Assessment Report puts forth a solid effort at developing an organized and sustained set of processes designed to assess Student Learning Outcomes.

The strengths of the process lie in two areas. First, the sample of courses used for assessment is varied in terms of course level; the program uses assessments in 200-, 300-, and 400- courses (CJUS 206, CJUS 306, and CJUS 410). Second, the review successfully articulates the goals of the program within the institutional context.

The weaknesses of the assessment process for CJUS are as follows: (1) the need for a stronger articulation of the link between Program Objectives and the courses required for its Major, (2) the need for a more comprehensive selection of courses and objectives used in the program review, and (3) the nature of some of the rubrics used.

The first of the areas in which the CJUS Program Assessment could be improved is the link between Program Objectives and the courses required of its Major. While the review does include an appendix aligning CJUS courses with each of the program objectives/learning outcomes, the absence of a Program of Study or other indication of required courses in the review materials leaves it unclear as to which of the courses are required to complete the program. This information is critical in determining if students are taking courses that expose them to each of the program objectives. Only once this is presented can the Program indicate that it has completed a comprehensive review of its Major requirements, its Program Objectives, or both.

Another area in which the CJUS Program assessment effort suggests could be improved is in the selection of courses and objectives selected for the program review. The program objectives identified for the review may have been more effectively evaluated with courses better aligned with each of the goals and learning outcomes to structure the data gathering and analysis. A rationale for the courses that were selected for the review is not presented. Currently it is unclear why Law Enforcement, Theories in Crime and Deviance, and Juvenile Justice were targeted for assessment and how they align with the program goals and learning outcomes. For example, the program objectives CJUS 206 is used to measure Learning Outcome 10, “Describe the evolution and objectives of the juvenile justice system and compare it to the adult justice system.” This outcome requires students to demonstrate both 200 (understanding) and 400 (analysis) levels of mastery. We agree and support the strategy of identifying a small number (3 to 5) of specific learning outcomes to assess for the Program Review, but a rationale for choosing those particular learning outcomes would strengthen the review. Further, the Program should take a more developmental approach to the assessments – e.g. in choosing a learning outcome, trace its presentation to students through the curriculum and demonstrate student growth through the different stages of the major. These should illustrate how a student is expected to grow in her understanding of a concept from introductory courses through more advanced courses in the major. It would have been useful to have seen the syllabi for each of these courses, but there is still a need for a justification for the use of particular courses to demonstrate particular learning outcomes.

For this reason, the quality of the rubrics used in the review to demonstrate Student Learning Outcomes is inconsistent. While the instruments used for assessment are varied, CJUS 410 and CJUS 306 use multiple choice assessments and/or true/false questions. Multiple choice assessments should be used sparingly and true/false questions not at all (e.g. the feminist question in Appendix C could be problematic – the reviewers would have gotten this question wrong – and believe that it may not provide robust data to inform program improvement).

Suggestions for Improvement

The following four areas for improvement are suggested. First, the Program should reconsider its Program Objectives/Learning Outcomes in relation to the courses it requires of its majors. Additionally, Program Objectives/Learning Outcomes should be articulated separately.

Second, we suggest that future reviews contextualize the program in relation to Trinity’s stated goals, making the link between program goals and institutional goals.

Third, each rubric must measure the elements of Student Learning Outcomes that it intends to measure separately; that means that if it measures two skills, A and B, it must differentiate between them such that a student with strengths in area A and weaknesses in area B are distinguishable from those with weaknesses in area A and strengths in area B.

Finally, a larger sample size on each measurement would provide more robust data on which to determine program improvements. Collecting data over several years will help increase sample sizes.