**Response to the Political Science Program Assessment Report 2011**

**Introduction**

The Political Science Program’s Assessment report from 2011 articulates a clear and accessible set of program goals, and the discussion of the courses and some of the specific assessments that contribute to those goals indicate the beginnings of a thorough program review. In the time since that review, ongoing data-collection, assessment and review should result in a even more thorough assessment.

**Suggestions and Comments**

On Mission Statement

The value of the Political Science Program to Trinity’s students and to Trinity’s overall mission cannot be understated, especially considering Trinity’s emphasis on liberal education, social justice and civic engagement in its Mission Statement. This connection between the Program and the most basic mission of the University should be a major point of emphasis, not only in the Program Assessment, but in any description of the Political Science Program. The Trinity tendency to understate its best accomplishments seems to be reflected in the Political Science assessment report.

On Program Goals and Objectives

As with many programs in the Social Sciences and Humanities, the Political Science Program serves as both a Major and service program to fulfill general education requirements for students majoring in other fields. The assessment data in the 2011 Program Assessment Report covers classes that apply to both general education and major requirements. The inclusion of assessment from both types of classes is a vital aspect of the Program Report, but the description of the Program in the Catalogue Description section of the report focuses primarily on the value of the courses to students who major in Political Science. The value of an understanding of Political Science to non-majors could be emphasized as well, especially as it feeds into the University’s overall Mission and Goals.

On Assessment Procedures, Data, and Analyses

According to their program goals, the Political Science Program offers 24 courses. Four of these courses satisfy the social sciences category of the Knowledge and Inquiry section of the general education curriculum. Political Science also offers two courses in each of the Applications areas of Civic Knowledge and Leadership. The assessment portion of the Program Report covers assessment for only four different courses (two from K&I, the other two presumably for their majors). It would be beneficial to understand the reasons these courses were chosen for assessment over the others. Was there a new book/assessment method/etc being utilized? Were these the only courses being offered by full-time faculty?

The assessment for 101:

* Focused assessment on a single goal. This is a good strategy in terms of being able to focus attention, but, again, if there are reasons for this particular choice, it would be beneficial for a full understanding of the assessment overall.
* The intention of the intake exam review is unclear. Is the only point of the intake exam to make sure students are appropriately placed? Is there an alternative placement otherwise?
* The data presented about checks and balances, etc, is a good before/after approach, however, it would be important to note how many students were in the class, if all of the students were present for both assessments, and if the students who are lacking in before/after are the same in each topic. Perhaps tabular display of the anonymous data collection would give a clearer picture.
* The conclusion is that “more class time will be devoted to the concept of federalism in the future.” Which course goal is this concept related to? Is there a benchmark in mind to decide if students have a satisfactory knowledge of federalism? It would be helpful to know if the instructor intends to try a different pedagogical approach to teaching this material.

The assessment for 311:

* The assessment for POLS 311 points out that there is a single case (Marbury v Madison) for which only 1 student answering perfectly. Again, it would be helpful here to bring the content in question back to a learning goal/course objective. As it is currently stated, the exam is measuring “students’ ability to explain the facts and opinion in the case.” Do students need to score perfectly on these questions in order to reach the desired level of understanding?
* The conclusion is to “spend more time dissecting the details of this case in the future.” How will this class time be utilized? Will the instructor develop a new approach, or introduce new sources?

The assessment for 363:

* The assessment does a nice job of stating the course objectives and pairing these objectives with the course component that will test them.
* The assessment focuses on data collected from the first exam, the results of which are compared with some questions on the intake exam.
* We would like to see more explanation along with the statistics given. That is, the sample size is different for each of the questions. Were students permitted to answer only some of the questions? Or were blank answers not included in the mean/median/mode calculations?
* The assessment shows improvement in students’ knowledge of types of intelligence. However, we are told that 24 students took the intake exam while only 14 answered question 1 on the exam. Similarly, we are told that students improved in their ability to list agencies that are part of the US intelligence community. It would be helpful if the results on each exam were given in consistent manners. That is, the intake exam keeps track of the number of correct responses out of 17 while the same question on test 1 is awarded points out of 25.

The assessment for 241:

* The assessment for this course again lists the full set of course objectives and then selects one goal on which to focus. This goal is tested on test 2.
* The approach of focusing attention on a single goal can be very effective in evaluating specific aspects of a course, however, we would like to see more details in the assessment and conclusions. That is, in this assessment, we are given the questions from test 2, but only the overall mean score for each of the two course sections. It would be beneficial to break down mean score on each question. Overall means of 81% and 85% indicate that students are answering questions more than satisfactorily. It could be possible, though, that a further break down of the scores could reveal that 2 of the 3 questions were answered very well by the majority of the students, but that they all struggled in exactly the same places on the third question.

In general, the Political Science program demonstrates an aptitude for linking program goals directly to in-class assessment tools, with generally positive results. We would like to see more in the way of analysis of the data collected. It is not clear from the narrative if students are reaching the level of understanding desired by the course instructor. That is, we would like to know if the professors are satisfied by the means shown in their data collection. Also, as noted above, in the few cases where deficiencies were noted, we would like to hear more specifics on possible course changes that may address the issues discovered.

Suggestions for Further Study

The Political Science department serves a huge number of Trinity’s students. In particular, by offering two out of the six approved courses for Civic Knowledge and for Leadership, the Political Science department plays a major role in the Applications section of the general education curriculum. This seems like an area that will be able to highlight the department well.

Similarly, the introduction of the narrative points out that Trinity’s location in DC is a wonderful resource for our political science students. We would like to see the department highlight any recent examples of internships or community work done by their students.

The connection of the Political Science curriculum to overall goals and mission of Trinity, and how Political Science contributes to the general education goal of civic engagement by all students should be clearly emphasized.

Mapping of course assessments through departmental, CAS and University goals should be included for students in the Major and for the general education service classes. This process should also include a review of current curricular offerings to determine whether all of the program’s goals for its students are being addressed and how that can be demonstrated. There should also be a discussion of curricular changes that have been implemented in the program, identifying what factors, assessments and reviews lead to those changes.

**Conclusion**

As with most of the other departments, the 2011 Program Review for Political Science was one of the first steps, if not the first step, in implementing a comprehensive, evidence-based review and assessment of the program within the context of the College and University Mission and Goals. Based on that experience and continued, ongoing reviews and revisions, the 2016 program review should be even more robust.