To: Dr. Josie Welsh, Director of Assessment Services

From: David R. Harding, Jr.


Date: April 16, 2013

Please accept this report on my experiences at the 2013 American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conference. My role at the conference was as a discussant for the Curricular and Program Assessment Track. Financial support for my attendance was provided by the Department of Political Science and the Office of Assessment Services.

At the conference, I participated in the Curricular and Program Assessment track, described by the conference organizers as follows:

“The Program Assessment track seeks to enhance our understanding of program assessment and its connection to the curricular design and outcomes objectives of political science programs. Papers should address the following types of questions: What are the challenges to departments creating effective assessment systems? Which methods and practices of outcomes assessment have proven most successful? How can departments and individual faculty members effectively integrate program-level assessment into departmental courses? And ultimately, how can political scientists enhance the use of assessment to refine goals, improve programs, and demonstrate program successes to both internal and external audiences?”

### Summary of the Curricular and Program Assessment Track

**Moderator:**

Candace C. Young, Truman State University

**Session A: Course-Level Curricular Choices and Assessment**

*Friday, Feb. 8 2:30 PM-3:30 PM*

*Assessment in Action: The Evolution of an Undergraduate Qualitative Research Methods Course*

- Melinda A. Mueller, Eastern Illinois University
- Lilian A. Barria, Eastern Illinois University
- Richard A. Wandling, Eastern Illinois University

*The Assessment of General Education Learning Outcomes in US Government*
| Session B: Involvement of Peers in Curriculum and Assessment  
**Friday, Feb. 8 5:15 PM-6:45 PM** |
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| *Does Peer Instruction Pedagogy Improve Student Learning Outcomes? Evidence from a Large Enrollment Political Science Course*  
Maureen C. Feeley, University of California, San Diego |
| *Bridging the Expert-Novice Divide in the Political Science Classroom*  
Jeffrey L. Bernstein, Eastern Michigan University |
| *Assessing the Political Science Undergraduate Degree: A Review of International Course and Non-Course Content*  
Ann Marie Mezzell, Lincoln University |
| *Facilitated Study Groups as a Learning Tool in the Core Curriculum: Design, Deployment, and Assessment in the University of California, Irvine’s Introduction to Criminology, Law & Society Course*  
Donna Schuele, University of California-Irvine  
Patricia Goforth, University of California, Irvine |

| Session C: Open Session  
**Saturday, Feb. 9 8:30 AM-10:00 AM** |
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| Session D: Non-traditional Classroom Curriculum and Assessment  
**Saturday, Feb. 9 10:15 AM-11:45 AM** |
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| *He Said, She Said: Tracking Gender Differences in Online Academic Discussions*  
Renee B. Van Vechten, University of Redlands |
| *Class Level Analysis from the Final Study*  
Susan J. Martin, Indiana University of Pennsylvania |
| *Assessing Simulations: Including Third Party Stakeholders*  
Bobbi Gentry, Millikin University |

| Session E: Open Session  
**Saturday, Feb. 9 1:45 PM-3:15 PM** |

| Session F: Program Level Curriculum and Assessment  
**Saturday, Feb. 9 3:30 PM-5:00 PM** |
Is Political Science Academically Adrift? Initial Findings in Designing New Departmental Assessment Tools to Assess Student Learning Outcomes

Bryan S. McQuide, Grand View College

Intersectionality, Reflexivity, and Assessment

Candice D. Ortbals, Pepperdine University

Title: P.S. Majors to J.D. Jobs — How Can We Help You? Assessing the Future of the Political Science Curriculum vis-à-vis the Future of Legal Education as Impacted by the Recession and Technology

Gregory R. Bordelon, Monmouth University

Program Assessment

Candace C. Young, Truman State University

Session G: Student Learning, Curriculum, Assessment, and the Future of the Academy
Sunday, Feb. 10 8:00 AM-9:30 AM

Changing Markets, Changing Providers: Responding to the Changing Nature of Higher Education in England

Jacqueline Ellen Briggs, University of Lincoln
Lisa Harrison, University of the West of England

Further information on the conference may be found at https://www.apsanet.org/content_31632.cfm?navID=206

Some comments on my experience at the conference

Among the most useful papers was Barria et. al (2013) “Assessment in Action: The Evolution of an Undergraduate Qualitative Research Methods Course.” Of particular interest to myself and, I believe, to my colleagues in the Political Science Department at ASU were the student learning outcomes (SLO’s) and the assessment questions related to them. I intend to provide copies of these to my colleagues during our annual end-of-year assessment meeting.

Another paper which provided interesting samples of assessment prompts was McQuide (2013) “Is Political Science Academically Adrift? Designing More Effective Departmental Assessment Tools to Assess Student Outcomes.” Our current assessment tool for both Intro to Politics and Intro to US Government (same format but different questions) uses incorporates and essay question similar to that used by McQuide. As he describes it, his prompts “required students to apply their knowledge and complex reasoning skills to real world problems” (p. 15). Unlike our assessment design, McQuide’s used a more complex design, comparing the scores of freshmen in political science courses to those of senior
political science majors. While this does not constitute the ideal comparison, his results are instructive and it is worth considering the use of an alternative design in our assessment plan to make the comparison more direct. To wit, with only minimal administrative and record keeping costs, data collected from individual students could be compared over time.

McQuide’s paper also made me aware of a thread in the literature on political science pedagogy that I found quite intriguing. Writing about one section of his assessment instrument, he reports:

The second section was to have short answer “conventional wisdom” essays designed to test whether students had: (1) unlearned incorrect beliefs held by the public about political phenomena; and (2) were able to support or refute these statements using political science research findings they had learned in their classes. This pedagogy was based on suggestions that political science departments need to be able to assess whether students have unlearned conventional myths they came into college with (Voparil 2009) and the wider concern that academia is failing at teaching students to develop evidence based arguments and unlearn incorrect beliefs about phenomena they held in high school (Hersh & Merrow 2005).

In assessing learning, it is sometimes important to assess unlearning as well. As Will Durant is quoted as saying, ‘Education is a progressive discovery of ignorance.’

Perhaps one of the most often heard themes during the discussion of the presentations and of assessment in general was how to administer and score assessments in a way that lends validity to the results obtained. My take-away from this discussion was that the jury is still out on these questions, among political scientists at least.

Bibliography
