embedded within the larger teaching and learning context and actually reinforce active learning pedagogy. In fact, many of us already perform assessment without recognizing it as such. It is often simply a matter of documenting what we are doing in the classroom and in the department, and then using the information to provide feedback. At the classroom level, closing the feedback loop can help improve classroom teaching and evaluate the usefulness of new experimental learning techniques. At the department level, assessment can be used in the program review process to advocate for the purchase of new equipment, justify the hiring of additional faculty, or increase department funding.

Recognizing What We Don't Know in Political Science

The presentations to the working group covered a wide range of topics from study abroad to information literacy education. In the end, however, all of them raised similar questions, which resulted in the recognition of three basic problems. First, we have no empirical knowledge about the impact of factors such as gender, GPA, and class ranking on the learning process. Second—and most discussed—is the question of what makes a meaningful assessment that is specific to political science, which not only focuses on knowledge but on skills and literacy—and all this without running the risk of repeating the mistakes implemented in K–12. As in previous years, devising an effective way to evaluate critical thinking headed the list of priorities, followed by the measurement of civic participation. Third, the majority of participants perceived that when becoming acquainted with assessment, it seems as if we are re-inventing the wheel, rather than crossing the Rubicon. There was an agreed desire for the discipline to discover a way of gathering and sharing national data on assessment and evaluation in political science.

Measuring Political Participation/ Active Citizenship

With the shift toward learning outcomes across academia, political science has positioned itself as the discipline that best cultivates political participation. However, active citizenship has proven challenging to assess. Our track discussed several possibilities for better assessment. Understanding information emerged as a precursor to active citizenship; we discussed how students must be able to determine the nature of information needed, to collect, sort, and analyze information, and to apply information to a particular task. Political science and library faculty suggested information literacy education as a tool. As active citizens, students must think critically. To do so they must make applications and reason logically toward analysis; measures of recall do not capture these skills. We discussed the importance of active learning assignments. Student context appears to holistically affect the way that students choose to engage, so we collectively began to refer to it as the "ecosystem." One presentation highlighted survey results showing that contemporary students engage in new forms of activism. These include wearing a yellow wristband, blogging, signing online petitions, text messaging poll responses, and boycotting a company. We wondered whether active citizens today "bowl alone" rather than together. Students appear to have a sense of efficacy through such actions and future studies of active citizenship may need to consider including them in analysis.

Future Areas of Research

One of the major themes to emerge concerned future areas of research. We, as a discipline, would benefit from better theory, better data, and more comparative research on assessment. At its core, assessment lacks a clear theoretical framework. We should think through the broader purposes of assessment as well as the specific ways in which assessment can be used to facilitate better teaching. While individual teacher-scholars are conducting excellent classroom experiments to improve personal and institutional assessment instruments, participants noted the need for collaborative data-collection across institutions as well as across disciplines. APSA might consider hosting assessment-related data available for public use. In addition, a major consensus of those in Assessment Track II was that there is a need to compare assessment tools as well as outcomes across various institutional settings, various levels of political science education, and various modes of instruction. By comparing assessment across public and private institutions, graduate and undergraduate courses, distance learning and traditional classroom settings, study abroad and on-campus environments, and elective and required course settings, we can more accurately identify what educational opportunities lead to what educational outcomes.

Conclusions

As can be evidenced from the preceding discussion, two pressing issues come to the fore: How best to integrate learning and assessment, and what should be the role of the APSA in the area of assessment? Every participant felt an obligation to enhance students' learning so that the educators can better equip them with critical thinking skills that can be transported across disciplines. An oft-repeated criticism of the field is that political science is theory without context; both presenters and discussants felt a need to mesh the two so that students can grasp the material being taught and that educators wield a tool to measure such learning. Another area of discussion was whether contemporary standards should be assimilated in learning and assessment to spark the interests of the students. As mentioned earlier, activism among students is of a different nature than activism of earlier generations. The fact that paucity in knowledge assessment has been noticed and efforts are being made to address the issue gives tremendous hope to those passionate about teaching.

Assessment/Learning Outcomes III Track Summary

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Assessment, by definition, is a means of estimating the quality or value of something. In this case assessment may be geared toward students directly in the form of enhancing learning, faculty in terms of better teaching, departments for improved curriculum development, and institutions for the purpose of public relations, resource allocation, and accreditation. This panel examined assessment in all of these cases, with a particular focus on assessment of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are at the very essence of what we as teachers are trying to achieve and assessment provides us with ways to determine whether we are actually meeting these goals. The purpose of this track was to examine both assessment and learning outcomes and to develop ways to improve both. This article synthesizes the main findings of papers presented in the track together with the ensuing discussion. The article is split into five major topics: the role of assessment, the uses of assessment, the inevitability of assessment, approaches of assessment, and how we do assessment.

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The Role of Assessment

First, what are we assessing and why? The panel agreed that at root we are concerned with assessing student learning. Consequently, assessment should be used as a tool in the pursuit of providing a clear understanding and enhancement of student learning. To answer the question's second part, why we assess student learning, we must first determine what we ultimately want students to learn in political science. Thus, the first goal of assessment must be to develop a clear outline of the specific skills, values, and knowledge content (significant learning) that we want students to obtain from individual classes and from the political science curriculum as a whole. This will provide criteria that will allow us to determine whether students are learning.

The Uses of Assessment

Should assessment be viewed as a goal or as a tool? Administrators may be predisposed to consider assessment as a goal due to institutional and legislative pressures to compare programs and institutions. Faculty members tend to resist assessment when it is used for this purpose. Conversely, faculty view assessment as a means to the ultimate end—the enhancement of student learning. Specifically, faculty regard assessment as a tool and learning as the goal. The panel established that assessment should be used to determine student learning outcomes, discover teaching strengths and deficiencies, and make curriculum changes, with the ultimate goal of increasing student learning opportunities. While assessment may take many different forms, and there may be many different uses, all of these goals should converge to enhance student learning.

The Inevitability of Assessment

Increasingly assessment is being forced upon faculty by administrators and legislators. As faculty members we must use this opportunity to shape the assessment process. Fundamentally, we should take charge of assessment. There must be a concerted effort to examine how other disciplines that have developed proficient assessment techniques, such as sociology and nursing, use assessment, and then employ those methods that best underscore the purposes that matter most, enhanced student learning. It was suggested that the APSA create a clearinghouse of tools for assessment on its web site with links to other competent assessment programs (e.g., nursing, psychology, and sociology), develop a task force on assessment, hold workshops at regional meetings, and include panels on the politics of assessment at the next Teaching and Learning Conference.

Approaches to Assessment

There are several different approaches to assessment. In particular, the panel outlined three characteristics of assessment: assessment of learning, for learning, and as learning (Earl 2003). Assessment of learning uses traditional assessment techniques, such as exams, papers, and tests, to determine what students are currently learning in their classes. Assessment of learning is summative in nature. Assessment for learning, a formative approach to assessment, observes what students are learning and where there are deficiencies on an on-going basis. This characteristic of assessment employs such techniques as students submitting a note card each week with questions that they may have. The final characteristic of assessment, assessment as learning, uses different assessment techniques, such as having students write self-reflection papers, their own political autobiographies, peer reviews, and engaging student participation as a means to encourage civic engagement.

How We Do Assessment

The overarching point that resulted from this discussion was that assessment requires multiple tools, and that the tools themselves must be flexible. Standardized assessment tools, such as IDEA forms, retention rates, GPAs, and GRE scores, are popular with administrators and legislators as they facilitate a comparison of institutions and allow for national rankings. In contrast, faculty members are typically opposed to student and faculty assessment on the basis of solely standardized means. Using only standardized assessment measures pressures faculty members to "teach to the test" in order to improve department or institutional standings. This contravenes the purpose of higher education and academic freedom, and it does not allow for assessment of educational experiences that are difficult to test from a standardized perspective, such as internships and study abroad programs. While some amount of standardized testing is inevitable, faculty, departments, and administrators must be diligent in developing and employing other forms of assessment, such as entrance and exit interviews, alumni surveys, and intern debriefings, to be used in conjunction with standardized tests.

The purpose of the session was to investigate assessment and learning outcomes. Through the course of presentations and discussion we tackled this issue and explored new approaches to assessment that show the importance of having clearly outlined course goals and the use of assessment as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Further discussion analyzed the different uses of assessment, of learning, for learning, and as learning, which evolved to include the different approaches for which assessment may be used. Although faculty may be resistant to standardized assessment, it is inevitable. Therefore it is in our best interest to find multiple, flexible methods of assessment to be used in conjunction with standardized means to meet our ultimate goal—enhanced student learning outcomes.

Reference

Earl, Lorna M. 2003. *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximize Student Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Simulations and Role Playing (S&RP) I Track Summary

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Purpose of S&RP

Undergraduates often have difficulty conceptualizing phenomena for which they have little experience, such as life in an Islamic state or the pressures of foreign policy decision making. The participants of the S&RP Track I explored multiple ways political science might address this challenge. While the exercises employed by participants differed, the desire to help students experientially learn key concepts and materials provided the central motivation. S&RP are a valuable complement to traditional teacher-centered methods of content delivery, such as lectures that tend to focus on acquisition of knowledge without reflection. One clear advantage of S&RP is the ability to encourage synthesis and evaluation of information by literally taking students out of their chairs and having them "learn by doing." Such strategies help students shift their roles from being passive receivers of information to active participants in the learning process. The participants of this track felt strongly that S&RP can play a vital role for students, faculty, and their institutions by enhanc-

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