belonging to departments ranging in size from 40 majors to over 1,100. Some attended because they wanted to share their enthusiasm for assessment, while others were interested in learning more about a process they were forced into by administrators, legislatures, or accreditation agencies. The group discussed many different aspects of assessment, including designing measurements for classroom and program assessment as well as some of the problems linked to assessment. We proposed the following summary conclusions:

1. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning.

Assessment focuses on finding out what students have learned. While not all departments and faculty members may value imposed assessment activities, most can agree that measuring student learning is important. Politicians, accreditation requirements, and university administrators put increasing value and weight on assessing what has been achieved and to determine the value of public and private investment in education. Consequently, more college and university faculty are taking a proactive approach to assure that the discipline will identify what is important to assess and what measures and practices are most useful in defining student achievement. Assessment allows faculty to verify what students learn; consequently, it will facilitate informed decisions about curricula and programs.

2. Learning objectives are the building blocks of assessment activity.

Before assessment can take place, it is critical to set out the learning objectives for the particular courses and groupings of courses. These objectives are best stated in terms of learner objectives, such as increase in knowledge or skills. Assessment links learning objectives with learning outcomes to see whether students have acquired the skills and knowledge they are taught. This is true for classroom and program assessment alike, and both levels of assessment are closely linked: We teach programmatic objectives through our courses and, often, we use course work to measure the extent to which students have achieved programmatic goals.

3. Political scientists have the skills to conduct meaningful assessment.

The political science quantitative and qualitative toolbox includes case studies, scoring rubrics, surveys, content analyses of portfolios, rating scales, reflective essays, standardized achievement tests, and focus groups. This toolbox fully equips faculty in the discipline to conduct meaningful assessment that can demonstrate the value of the discipline as part of students' educational experience.

4. Assessment can be beneficial.

By analyzing what the students have and have not learned, instructors and programs can improve curricula and teaching methods, thereby improving students' learning. Since program assessment is a collaborative undertaking, the endeavor can stimulate new conversations and partnerships among departmental faculty members and with other units on campus, such as assessment or teaching and learning centers. Assessment results can be used to demonstrate the unique contribution our discipline makes for higher education. They might also be used to leverage additional resources for political science departments and faculty. For individual faculty members, assessment provides another opportunity to engage in research by practicing the scholarship of teaching and learning.

5. Assessment is not without challenges.

The assessment process requires resources and time, and often these are not readily available. Moreover, oftentimes faculty members find it difficult to agree on what is to be assessed, and how. If assessment produces improved student learning, that ought rightly to lead to higher student grades—and to the perception of grade inflation. In addition, faculty members often fear a general loss of autonomy, particularly if assessment is imposed from the outside. Finally there is the Big Fear: What if we measure student learning and find that there is none? Will we lose students, administrative support, and funding as a result? And what of the individual faculty whose courses are found to be ineffective? Will they suffer punitive consequences? Given these fears, departments may be tempted to devise assessment measures that are designed to cover up problems, rather than reveal them. If assessment is to be effective, it must not be punitive—but that principle may be hard to maintain in practice.

6. Next steps.

Our track members concluded that assessment is becoming a part of the academic endeavor that will gain in importance. Consequently, the track suggests that APSA continue to facilitate and take a more visible leadership role in assisting faculty members in their assessment efforts, both at the level of classroom instruction as well as at the programmatic level. APSA could become more engaged in the national discussion on assessment, help develop testing instruments that are germane to the discipline and could be obtained at low cost to faculty and departments, and take a leadership role in coordinating resources and training for assessment in the profession. It is essential that assessment demonstrate the unique contribution political science makes to the undergraduate curriculum. Despite the problems inherent in assessment, it is thus of fundamental importance to the discipline.

Assessment/Learning Outcomes II Track Summary

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At the third annual APSA Teaching and Learning Conference, attendees in the Assessment/Learning Outcomes II session engaged in vigorous discussion over how best to integrate assessment with learning. The participants reflected a good mix of both community college and university perspectives, yet found that the necessity for efficacious assessment cuts across the discipline; concerted efforts should be made to encourage and enhance learning and consequently, assessment. Key themes that emerged from the track are reviewed below.

Fostering a Measurable Assessment Culture

Conference participants acknowledged the challenges of fostering a measurable assessment culture within the political science discipline. A recurring idea was that if political science does not govern its own discipline with respect to assessment, someone else would. To this end, APSA should take the lead in providing resources to departments and faculty interested in developing assessment programs. Some of these resources may include an APSA web site where members can access examples of "best" and "worst" practices posted by other members, sample department programs' missions and learning objectives, and utilize a test question databank. Assessment need not be difficult or threatening. In most instances, it can be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506270896 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096506270896 Published online by Cambridge University Press