Central Washington University
Assessment of Student Learning
Department and Program Report

Please enter the appropriate information concerning your student learning assessment activities for this year.

Academic Year of Report: _2013-14 (Dec. '14)_  College: _Sciences_  Department _Political Science_  Program: _Major (BA; small/large plans)_

1. What student learning outcomes were assessed this year, and why?
In answering this question, please identify the specific student learning outcomes you assessed this year, reasons for assessing these outcomes, with the outcomes written in clear, measurable terms, and note how the outcomes are linked to department, college and university mission and goals.

The department conducted an assessment of one direct learning outcome, as well as a review of one relevant *programmatic outcome* dealing with student success and academic achievement that encompasses holistic learning outcomes. These are explained below.

*Outcome1.* This outcome concerns the department’s major goals/learning outcome (see department website for all of them) regarding the core knowledge in the discipline, and corresponding core courses in the major curriculum. To quote the outcome, graduating majors are to: “[d]emonstrate an understanding of basic concepts and facts in each of the four subfields [of American politics, comparative politics, international politics, and political theory/philosophy]. Besides the evaluable procedures and tasks in the courses themselves, students will demonstrate this knowledge in the end-of-major capstone course.” This outcome has been the subject of previous reports; however, here, rather than examining the students’ learning or results on the core exam as a whole, we instead examine learning (or at least, test results) *in each of the subfields* by comparison, rather than all of them as one exam score. The other reason for choosing this outcome (and the way it was assessed/measured) is because the Department undertook a revision of the common, core concepts taught in those classes, both for instructors and students, as well as a new test bank over those concepts from those courses in the 489 course, for Fall, 2013, because of changes in instructors and material over the past few years. Thus, this was the first academic year a new exam, study guide and agreed-upon concepts were utilized.

*Outcome2.* This outcome was taken from the Department’s new Strategic Plan (2012-13, and continuing) -- “Enhance Student Success in Major-Field Content” which was placed under University Objective 1.1. This strategic outcome deals directly with student success in both achieving department outcomes and earning their degree, since the Senior Assessment course is both the main mechanism for gathering data for assessing learning outcomes, and also is a core requirement in the major (i.e., required course for graduation). The stated performance criteria was “80% will pass /get a C- in PoSc 489 Senior Assessment the first time taking it.” Thus, determining how many students pass (a minimum grade of C- is required in all major courses) the assessment course, at least the first time, is a key indicator of overall student achievement of departmental outcomes. The
reason this outcome was selected is that it is a holistic outcome of student success, and was a new outcome coming out of the most recent Strategic Planning Process.

The purpose of this year’s assessment report was thus two-fold: first, to compare the assessment results from the capstone course’s exam (data) on each of the four subfields, to determine whether students are performing differently; and second, to see how many students do in fact get through the 489 class without re-taking it, to judge the program as well as, indirectly, that course. In other words, the second part is to provide a preliminary assessment of this outcome, since it is only based on one year’s worth of data or one senior class of majors.

These outcomes obviously relate to the department’s goals of having students demonstrate a command of the basic knowledge of the field through its four main divisions (and core required courses in the major), as listed above, as well as achieving overall outcomes through satisfactory completion of the Senior Assessment exit course. They also apply to College mission statement and objective that “...prepares students for enlightened and productive lives through the intertwined endeavors of learning and research in the classroom, laboratory, and field.” They directly apply to University strategic plan goal 1.11, “Students will achieve programmatic learning outcomes.”

2. **How were they assessed?**

In answering these questions, please concisely describe the specific methods used in assessing student learning. Please also specify the population assessed, when the assessment took place, and the standard of mastery (criterion) against which you will compare your assessment results. If appropriate, please list survey or questionnaire response rate from total population.

**A) What methods were used?**

**B) Who was assessed?**

**C) When was it assessed?**

This section will be answered by addressing each of the outcomes separately, though there are similarities. (Suggestion: logically it seems that “A. Methods” should come last, and “Who and When” be moved to first and second.)

*Outcome 1. Sub-Field Mastery, or Comparison of Performance in 4 Sub-fields.*

**A) METHODS:** To assess mastery of these concepts, all students must take a Senior Assessment Exit Examination, which is a four-part exam consisting of 50 short-answer questions (worth 2 points each) designed by the department and based on basic knowledge in the required four “introduction to the subfield” courses of POSC 210 (American), 260 (Comparative), 270 (International) and Theory (student's
choice of 481 (Ancient), 482 (Early Modern), 483 (Contemporary) and 485 (American) Political Thought, respectively. Students collectively are graded out of the 100 total points, which is one-half of their grade in the course (the other half from their research paper); together, they must get a “C-” in the course to graduate. Three faculty members, the instructor and two who have expertise in respective sub-fields (parts of the test), grade the exam and the score is averaged between the two (sets) of professors.

[Note: this is at the end; individual instructors of these core courses assess the acquisition of such knowledge in core courses through their own assessment regimes.]

Although the exams (during the 2013-14 academic year, anyway) were given either as two exams covering two sub-fields each, or four individual exams, these as a whole are added together and constitute 50 percent of the course grade (a required research paper is the other 50 percent). Here, however, percentages for each of the exam portions for each respective sub-field were calculated to determine relative student success in each sub-field, regardless of the student’s total score. In other words, a student taking a combined exam covering the Comparative and International sub-fields might’ve earned an overall score of 80%, but may have received say 90% on comparative and only 70% on international, assuming equality of questions/points in each sub-section. In other words, we instead broke down the student’s performance in each of the fields or scores covering each part. These standardized (percentage) scores in each sub-field were then averaged, so that a comparison can be made between each of them.

The basic standard of mastery for each student is presumably is 70 percent for each sub-field, since all told that would add up to roughly a C-, as that is the overall grade required to receive credit. As noted below, however, students can get higher grades on the paper and some aspects of the exam and thus compensate for lower scores on some parts. The scores will mainly be used for department feedback purposes, as the overall grade is the key determinant (see Outcome 2, below).

The aggregate standard, however, is less clear. Presumably, the average grade for each section (sub-field part of the test) should be 70 or higher, though one would hope for seniors it would be at least 75%. We also will calculate the percentage of students who score 70 or higher on each section – again, there is no clear standard. That result will simply be descriptive data, as the department has never done such an analysis, nor are grades calculated by test-sub-part, which instead uses total points on all the exams. (Also, the exam is not exactly equally divided by subfield.)

B) **POPULATION**: Senior majors, supposedly in their last 1-2 quarters (though really once have taken core requirements, but at least senior standing), in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course (a 2-credit hour course).

C) **TIMEFRAME**: At the end of their career, as noted above, though in this case it was all seniors enrolled in POSC 489 in the 2013-14 academic year.
Outcome 2. Student Success via Satisfactory Completion of Assessment/Exit Course.

A) METHODS: Earned letter grades by each of the students enrolled in POSC 489, on their first try at the course. As noted, students must earn a C- grade or better in order for the course to count for their major/earn credit toward their degree. Again, the criterion was 80 percent success.

B) POPULATION: Senior majors, supposedly in their last 1-2 quarters (though really once have taken core requirements, but at least senior standing), in the required POSC 489, Senior Assessment course (a 2-credit hour course).

C) TIMEFRAME: At the end of their career, as noted above, though in this case it was all seniors enrolled in POSC 489 in the 2013-14 academic year.

3. What was learned?
In answering this question, please report results in specific qualitative or quantitative terms, with the results linked to the outcomes you assessed, and compared to the standard of mastery (criterion) you noted above. Please also include a concise interpretation or analysis of the results.

Outcome 1. Sub-Field Mastery, or Comparison of Performance in 4 Sub-fields.
Here, student performance on each of sections of the exam corresponding to each subfield for those enrolled in AY 2013-14 were tallied and standardized on a percentage basis, since as noted not all subfields have the same number of questions or possible points. This was then averaged as well as tabulated as the percentage of students who scored above 70 or a C- standard for each section (though as noted that is not how grades are calculated), is reported below. Given the results, and the fact averages as well as raw numbers can misconstrue, the percentage of students who scored at least 60 percent (D-) is also reported for another frame of reference, namely as a better measure of how much the “underperformers” are underperforming.

Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Politics</th>
<th>Political Theory</th>
<th>Comparative Politics</th>
<th>International Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average % Score:</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio Students 70%-plus:</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio Students 60%-plus:</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion
Several patterns are evident from these results. First, students perform poorest (relatively speaking) on the Political Theory sub-field. This is perhaps not surprising, because it is one of four different classes (students must choose 1), all at 400-level, and as a sub-field is arguably more difficult material (e.g., reading the original works of Plato, Marx, etc.). However, students generally take the course in this subfield their senior year, when it theoretically would be freshest (though granted, the other 200-level courses). Students also generally get less exposure to political theory since there are only 4 courses, 2 of which are offered in alternate years. The lower-division not only are offered every quarter, students can take more advanced courses in the other subfields as electives (they could to that with theory, too, but most do not). Whether some discussion of the exam questions, or the material in theory courses, should be examined is something the department will need to discuss. The other courses seem similar.

Second, the average scores in the other three subfields put them in the C/C+ range, not bad relatively speaking given some students might not have had this material in a while. Still, one might expect it could be higher.

Third, clearly the fact that about 2/3rds of the students score higher than a C- in each area might be higher. However, when one looks at the number that at least score 60 percent, with the exception of political theory again, it is an overwhelming number. So, it is not like students are completely failing each part of the exam.

Outcome2. Student Success via Satisfactory Completion of Assessment/Exit Course.
As noted, this outcome is measured by the simple ratio of students who earned credit in the 489 course by earning a grade of a C- or above on their first attempt at the class, since repeats are allowed under University policy. As a reminder, the Department’s self-imposed and administratively-blessed criteria was an 80% success (pass, or really “credit for the course”) rate.

Results [Note: course was not offered Winter, 2014]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total #</th>
<th># C-/above</th>
<th># LT C-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall, 2013:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring, 2014:</td>
<td>26 (30*)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL “first tries”:</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29 (87.8%)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Enrollment was 30, but 2 students received “I” or “W” grades, and two students re-took the course from Fall and thus are not counted.
It also should be noted that one of the two that did not receive credit in the Fall was penalized for not completing the exit survey and would have received an above C- grade if they had done so. And both of those who re-took the course in Spring after failing to achieve the C- in the Fall did successfully complete the course on the second try. One of those who did not get credit for the course in the Spring (and failed with an F grade) did so because they did not hand in the required paper assignment as the syllabus required, and so did not even attempt the exams. At the same time, one of the withdrawals in the Spring also failed the paper assignment for lateness and was on target to fail the course (that student then subsequently dropped the major and graduated as a minor). One could argue that the relative success rate for major students who actually attempted all of the course’s assignments is higher than the raw score reported above. Furthermore, this suggests that students are not being held back from graduating by this requirement.

Discussion
From these results, it is clear that 88%, or 9/10 or at least 16/18 of every senior major does make it through the 489 class with at least the minimum C- grade on their first attempt. By combining this finding with those from Outcome1, it may be that they are doing so (in general) by being stronger in some areas than others – not just parts of the exam, but also, presumably, the research paper. One would expect that there would be some variation, however.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?
In answering this question, please note specific changes to your program as they affect student learning, and as they are related to results from the assessment process. If no changes are planned, please describe why no changes are needed. In addition, how will the department report the results and changes to internal and external constituents (e.g., advisory groups, newsletters, forums, etc.).

Outcome1. Sub-Field Mastery, or Comparison of Performance in 4 Sub-fields.
As noted, this type of analysis (exam results by subfield rather than in toto) has not been performed before. Therefore, the results, granted tentative at that, will be shared with the department and discussed at department meeting(s). Clearly, how one chooses to look at the data affects how one thinks about it and how it should be used.

Since the Department just re-vamped the core terms list, and the exam, over a year ago, it is unlikely we will attempt alterations in the exam or the measurement instrument. What we may do is to see to what extent these concepts are being used in the courses themselves, and perhaps taught or are assessed. Perhaps incorporating some of the senior assessment test questions, or key terms, directly into courses might help. Again, with the lower division core, however (US/210, Comparative/260, International/270) a wider range of instructors teach those courses, including adjuncts but especially faculty at community colleges, where we have little control over the content. While these classes do have a degree of common content in the discipline, again we do not have control over what
material is covered in those courses. (More sophisticated analyses would have to examine the relative scores of transfer versus non-transfer students on the exam, etc., though we do provide the students – and for that matter, part-time adjunct instructors who teach those courses - with the list of key terms.) Furthermore, as noted in previous such reports, we are dealing with adults here (the students, that is), and they are primarily responsible for their own learning – any failure on their part to absorb and assimilate core knowledge in the field is not necessarily due to our teaching methods.

In any event, the Department will discuss these results and possibly suggest alterations.

**Outcome 2. Student Success via Satisfactory Completion of Assessment/Exit Course.** Since the results show that the department achieved its objective -- preliminary indications are that 16 of every 18 students are “getting through” the Senior Assessment course with a C- grade (essentially 70/100) -- and the feedback thus indicates positive results for the program, no further change would seem to be warranted. Nevertheless, the Department will discuss these results and to what extent they may be due to students doing better on one element of the assessment course (and department outcomes), the paper, versus the exams, given the results of Outcome 1. (The paper is worth 50 percent of the course grade, and the four-part exam, 50 percent, along with a required but non-graded exit survey). Since the department just recently instituted a new exam test bank, and list of key terms, for that course to correspond to what is taught in the core courses in Fall 2013, further discussion about common concepts, and outcomes, in the required content courses and their accurate reflection in the exam given in the 489 exit course will take place. The Department will certainly report this result on future iterations of the Strategic Plan, as well as in Program Review next year or the year after.

One might argue that perhaps the bar should be raised, but given we do not control what students are taught – i.e., since three of our four core courses are lower-division ones commonly taught in the major, at other institutions and especially community colleges where students can transfer such credits in -- we can only control (and assess) what we do in those courses. We can only tell students what they are responsible for knowing in 489, and making sure it corresponds to what we do in the content courses. Thus, it seems reasonable to keep this standard, especially given this is only one year’s/class’s worth of data. Besides, if more than 90 percent of students are getting through on the first try one might question the department’s standards.

5. **What did the department or program do in response to last year’s assessment information?**

   In answering this question, please describe any changes that have been made to improve student learning based on previous assessment results. Please also discuss any changes you have made to your assessment plan or assessment methods.
The honest answer is: I do not know, because a) I was not the Department Chair last year, and therefore was not responsible for this report (ask Dr. Bang-Soon Yoon, who was); and b) to my knowledge, no assessment report or discussion of the assessment results were shared with the department. There were definitely discussions about assessment, and the Senior Assessment course (such as developing a common paper grading scheme, etc.) in department meetings. But I was not informed of any steps that were taken.

I would note, however, that – possibly due to changes in staffing, and informal impressions that the exit exam (and the key list of terms and concepts that must be covered by all instructors in given core required courses, and provided to the students) in the capstone course was probably outdated or at least failed to match what students were being taught – the department on its own did undertake in 2012-13 an update of the exit exam and key (common) concepts, which were implemented beginning Fall, 2013, as explained above. At some point we may assess the effectiveness of the new exam and whether students are scoring higher on it, compared to the old one, but given we only had one year’s worth of data, it seemed premature at this point in time to do so.

6. Questions or suggestions concerning Assessment of Student Learning at Central Washington University:

Since we are now once again doing Program Review, if the assessment committee or whoever is responsible for this currently (Assoc. Provost’s office?) would provide more information on what about assessment is required in the Program Review document, and/or more important what accreditation requires, it would help departments to better decide what to do in annual assessment exercises/reports.

It also would be helpful for departments as well as chairs or department assessment “czars” if some of what other departments are doing (presumably, doing well) could be more widely shared. (Yes, these are on the web, but rather than having to look through all of them, providing some suggestions about good and relevant (to a particular program) ones that might serve as models and food for thought would be more efficient). Feedback on the reports by the committee is nice, and useful up to a point, but examples of other departments with strong efforts, if not reports, would be even more helpful.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Todd Schaefer
Professor and Chair
Political Science Department
December 29, 2014