In keeping with the Department’s S.L.O.P(lan), this year Political Science assessed Outcome Three, “Students will acquire the analytical tools and skills used within the discipline” at the undergraduate level. This relates to the University Strategic Plan Outcome 1.1.1.: Students will achieve programmatic learning outcomes.” The reason we assessed this outcome was that it was its “turn” in the rotation of outcomes in the SLOP, and it has not been assessed for at least two years.

2. How were the student learning outcomes assessed?  
   A) What methods were used?

   The methods that were used, again following the SLOP, were analyses of the significant paper assignment(s) in advanced coursework – the upper division elective courses, and the required paper in the Senior Assessment course, respectively. This was a direct assessment that measured performance or competency. As a periodic, during-the-major measure we used the papers submitted in (almost) all upper-division electives during the year, compared with the required research paper in the 489 senior exit course submitted by students during the year. These were assessed using the grade/evaluation of the products in each of the courses. In other words, all instructors of each course reported on the grade distribution of the papers (or major paper or analytical writing assignment, if they gave something else or more than one) in these courses over the past year (2014-15). The same measure or data was collected from the three sections (taught by three different instructors, but also raw material collected by the department) of Senior Assessment course in 2014-15.

   As a guide, the department considers “A” papers (or 90 percentile) to be those that contain the whole enchilada – a clear topic and thesis statement (point), backed up with an analysis and research or other evidence, and written proficiently and in accepted style; “B” papers do contain significant analysis and probably have some conclusion, but fail to present it directly through thesis, or have clear argument, etc., but don’t prove it sufficiently (lots of evidence, weaker argument, or strong argument, less evidence); “C” papers provide some level of analysis but are mostly descriptive or fail to explain it clearly to the reader or do not have enough evidence to support claims; “D” papers lack specific clarity, are mostly poorly supported (or incorrectly supported) diatribes, etc.,
and “F” papers do not address the assignment at all or violate course guidelines (plagiarism; lateness, fail to submit, etc.).

Another method that was used, since it was mentioned in the SLOP, was an indirect attitudinal measure. This was the response of the students in the Senior exit course to the question on the (required) senior exit survey, “Do you believe the department prepared you well for life after graduation, whether in a job or in graduate study in political science or a related field?”

**B) Who was assessed?**

The student population overall was majors, especially for the Senior exit course, though this was not exactly true for the papers in the upper-division elective courses (generally this includes minors and in some cases, depending upon the class, non-majors. It was difficult to ask all of the professors to exclude students who were non-majors in their class months later.) In particular, the point of the assessment exercise in including upper-level courses was to compare senior, about-to-graduate majors with advanced students during their academic careers.

The “population” for the upper-division elective courses were 220 papers submitted in 15 different courses. (Two instructors did not provide data – one an adjunct for the African Politics class, and the other, Prof. Rex Wirth for three of his courses because according to him student grade data is removed after one year in the Canvas Learning Management System where he kept all of this. A couple of courses didn’t assign a paper.) Granted, this probably doesn’t equal 220 different students since undoubtedly some students took more than one course, but the product seems to be the more applicable level of data here.

The population for the Senior assessment course (exiting majors) was 28 students, who all had to complete the required 10-12 page research paper used in the three sections of that course during the year, one each term.

For the question from the senior exit survey, we had 19 responses of the 28 students who took the course (though granted, two students had to re-take the course and had already done the survey in a previous term, so we excused). Due to our lack of a Department Secretary, who administers the survey to insure confidentiality, during much of Fall, 2014-Winter, 2015 (ours resigned early in Fall term and we didn’t hire a permanent replacement till later the next term) and through using temps, etc., some of the student survey responses were either lost or not submitted and were not followed up. So, the response rate was 73 percent. (We’ll do better, as it is usually 100, and last year was an unusual situation.)

**C) When was it assessed?**

The periodic assessment was the major paper assignment during the term in all upper-division classes. The end-of-major assessment was the research paper assignment
in the Senior exit course, which usually comes at the middle of the term, during the last or second-to-last (rarely, third-or-more-to-last) quarter. (Note: the 489 course is limited to senior standing, and those that have completed all of the department’s required but not elective courses.)

3. What was learned?

The results of the comparison show that students for the most part do a decent job with paper assignments, and achieving a degree of analysis and argumentation, which is the bulk of the paper grade, in both areas. Indeed, average grades from the general distribution are around a B. They do appear to do slightly better in the (300- and few 400-level) electives. However, when one considers that senior paper may be a significantly longer or different type – being a traditional, secondary, argumentative paper – than ones in some elective courses, this is understandable. Furthermore, given the senior exit class is merely demonstrating that they can do a paper, and while it is substantive, it is not directly linked to course content, and given usual issues of “senioritis” it may not be surprising these results show little difference. Besides, the differences between them in an absolute sense are not great in any event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment (Grade):</th>
<th>A's</th>
<th>B's</th>
<th>C's</th>
<th>D's</th>
<th>F's</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Average GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Division Electives:</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>3.06 (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Assessment Course:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.89 (B/-)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: two students failed the paper in the 489 course because they failed to do the required department exit survey and that instructor deducted significant points from their paper grade, even though they submitted an acceptable paper on time. If these students are omitted, the average grade increases to 3.11, or just above a B.

On the other hand, another way of looking at the data is from the standpoint of the whether students are minimally proficient or better, and the proportion that fall into those categories. By this standard, if we take C- or higher as “proficient,” and B- or higher as “more than proficient” the results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proficient:</th>
<th>Better than Proficient (Good-Excel):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Division Electives:</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Assessment Course:</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this angle, it is clear that the bulk of the students are reasonably proficient and thus do seem to achieve the goal of analyzing issues, problems, or topics in the field and presenting them in written work.
Comparison with Standards: We don’t have a direct standard measure for the electives, other than the general requirement that students must get a C- in the course for it to count in the major (see the Dept. SLOP) and thus should do at least C work on all assignments. We do however, have a clear standard for the exit course: B- average grade now, and a goal of B (again, see SLOP). Clearly, we are close to if not meeting our goal (we are a bit short, but not much with the raw data of B- ). Having almost 80% of the students achieve at least B on the senior paper also seems acceptable, though perhaps we should alter our standards of measurement to this type of more ordinal scale.

As for the survey question, clearly it is an imperfect measure, and we likewise have no direct expectation; here it is more for simple interest or descriptive data. The question format is open-ended, “Do you believe your political science education prepared you well for life after graduation – whether in a job or in graduate study in political science or a related field?” but the Department Chair coded the responses as positive or negative (generally, it does prompt students toward at least a clear yes or no, with useful clarification and explanation.) Where the students responded ambivalently, or mixed, it was coded as “unsure/maybe.”

Yes: 15 (79%)
No: 2 (11%)
?/Maybe: 2 (11%)

Again, we have no standard for expectation, as we’ve never used this measure for this exercise before. But based simply on impressions, that about 80% of the students (again, similar to the paper results) express belief in their education - granted, before they’ve directly experienced its value - seems to indicate a reasonable if not high degree of satisfaction, and thus, success.

4. What will the department or program do as a result of that information?

We will have a meeting to report and discuss the results of this report in Winter quarter. The fact that students basically appear to be doing well, or at least decently on their writing assignments (the vast majority are better than simply proficient), means at a minimum not much needs to be done. Indeed, when we discussed issues of writing (and even, specifically the paper assignment in senior assessment) at our Program Review Retreat in November, 2015 it appeared that the faculty were concerned about having a “one size fits all” approach (like mandating a traditional, secondary-sourced paper, versus diverse alternatives like policy white papers for the US foreign policy courses or policy evaluations for public policy, law briefs for law courses, etc.), but basically the faculty seemed fairly satisfied with the quality of work they get in papers, with usual caveats about distribution, late submissions, processes and procedures, getting some students to take revision seriously, etc. We will discuss potential strategies that each of us use to address these concerns at least in terms of mutual support.

As the department is currently going through Program Review, we already plan to discuss some curricular and course mechanics or content issues at a future meeting after
the initial report is submitted and external reviewers have given their feedback, roughly in mid-Spring Quarter, 2016.

While the survey question, “Prepared well for life after graduation...?” is admittedly an imperfect measure, the fact that almost 80 percent of our graduating seniors does give some indirect indication that they think they gained a good education, which includes writing and analytical thinking.

Along these lines, we may also add or change the question(s) on the senior exit survey to better measure, for example, the degree to which they think they have acquired analytical tools, etc. Personally, I find the idea students develop certain “attitudes” in the discipline or whatever to be an odd measure of assessment of learning, especially when in political science we should be encouraging them to think for themselves. (One can attempt to measure this, but it seems as if attitudinally this raises serious measurement and validity if not moral issues). We do already ask a question about whether their views about politics have changed during their career with us.

As far as reporting the results to “internal and external constituencies” it seems that we are doing both of these with this report (and additionally internally having the above discussion). We’re not exactly sure what is meant by this charge. Are we to post it on our website to mollify or perhaps terrorize students? Are we to build a minaret atop the Psychology Building with a mosque-like multi-directional bullhorn and announce to the masses how our students have done on the analytical aspects of their paper to community? Please give us a larger budget, then.

5. What did the department or program do in response to previous years’ assessment results, and what was the effect of those changes?

Last year we examined differences in the results on the multi-part senior exit exam by sub-field (and core required course) in the discipline (American, Comparative, International, and Theory). We found that scores on the theory part of the test, which granted covers higher-level course material, were lower than the others, though scores on the overall exam were high enough for the vast majority to get through the course and graduate [see SLOAR, 2013-14]. We then had a discussion about this finding at a department meeting, and there was some support or interest in possibly creating a required lower-division theory course akin to the other subfields but that it would need to go through internal vetting about design, etc., and then external major programmatic-level curriculum changes (which take time). Such change(s) also have other ramifications about staffing and course sequencing, etc. So, we decided to make at a minimum the course materials (and thinkers/theorists and their related concepts) at least for sure matched information asked on the exit test, to hopefully at least ensure this was not a one-time anomaly, and we would revisit the larger curricular issues later.

Again, since our department is going through Program Review this year, we believe we should wait until after hearing at least from the external reviewers and administration about our program and possibly this aspect. We do plan to have a curriculum summit” about this and other issues sometime in Spring Quarter of 2016. Whether we change the requirement and/or create a new class will likely, though not necessarily, be determined then.
Another minor change we made, but not necessarily in response to the assessment results but more for analytical and archiving reasons, is that this year, as an experiment, we have decided to administer the senior exit survey via Survey Monkey (though with secretary’s access to again ensure confidentiality), which allows the department easier access to and analysis/manipulation of the data. It did require tweaking the format slightly while retaining the same questions/information, however. But as noted, we may change the survey in any event.

6. Questions or suggestions? Contact Tom Henderson (henderst@cwu.edu) or Bret Smith (bpsmith@cwu.edu)
The order of these questions has always seemed odd to me – it seems like who and when should come before how, since some of the method is related to the population, etc., and would flow from the “which outcome, and why” in Q. 1. But I guess it doesn’t matter that much.

Respectfully Submitted,

Todd Schaefer
Professor and Chair
12/11/2015