

2008 APSA Teaching and Learning Track Summaries

Track One: Program Assessment

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If the presentations and discussions of the Program Assessment track are any indication, assessment in political science is slowly moving forward. Several presentations provided excellent ideas for instructors and departments seeking to get started and move beyond to take assessment seriously. Presenters and discussants were a mix of veterans and newcomers to assessment from a range of institutions, but the group largely shared an understanding that assessment done well is really a conversation about teaching. Teaching political science is something that we all care about.

Walk, Don't Run.

Many political science departments are now beginning to take assessment seriously. Commitment to assessment tends to follow cycles of attentiveness and focus followed by neglect and ambivalence. Among the myriad reasons for this cycle are factors such as institutional politics, changes in departmental membership, new leadership, fiscal stress, and external demands such as accreditation. But once committed to begin or renew serious assessment efforts, departments often impatiently rush to develop extensive assessment programs.

A functional assessment program will not only provide data for administrators, but will provide feedback about both student-learning outcomes and the assessment process itself, fostering an ongoing conversation about teaching. Assessment takes time, both inside and outside the classroom. Yet if the faculty members assume that they are undertaking assessment for assessment's sake, even small commitments of time will seem onerous. Recurrent themes in panel presentations and discussions included

The 2008 Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) was held on February 22–24, 2008, in San Jose, California. This year marks the fifth annual TLC. The conference uses the Working Group model, permitting in-depth discussion and debate amongst colleagues on research dealing with the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition to the 12 Working Groups, there were workshops on various topics. This year there were over 300 registrants, including college and university faculty, graduate students, high school teachers, non-profit representatives, and others. Michael Brintnall and Kimberly Mealy of APSA offered welcoming remarks. APSA President Dianne Pinderhughes, University of Notre Dame, was the 2008 TLC opening speaker. Dr. Luis Fraga, former APSA council member and associate vice provost of the University of Washington, delivered the keynote address "The Responsibilities of Leadership: Political Science Education for the 21st Century." The closing program featured short presentations from the chair of the Programming Committee, Sherri Wallace, and from each track moderator. It is our hope that the ideas generated and shared at the TLC will help to foster debate, research, and pedagogical innovations within the discipline.

In addition to a host of sponsors and exhibitors, the 2008 conference also featured two Program Partners, Point Loma Nazarene University and Northeastern University. These schools' contributions have helped support APSA's year-long commitment to teaching and learning in the discipline of political science. For more information on the Partners Program, visit www.apsanet.org/content_44609.cfm.

APSA would like to thank the following individuals for their service on the 2008 Teaching and Learning Conference Program Committee: Sherri L. Wallace, University of Louisville, chair; Helen Boutrous, Mount Saint Mary's College; Juan Carlos Huerta, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi; Russell Mayer, Merrimack College; Cameron G. Thies, University of Missouri-Columbia; and Christopher Van Aller, Winthrop University. These six committee members, along with the following six individuals, served as the 2008 track moderators: Marcus D. Allen, Wheaton College; Mitchell Brown, Auburn University; Tim Meinke, Lynchburg College; Chad Raymond, Elon University; William R. Wilkerson, SUNY Oneonta; and Pamela Zeiser, University of North Florida. For more information on the 2008 TLC or the upcoming 2009 TLC, visit www.apsanet.org/section_236.cfm or contact Kim Mealy at kmealy@apsanet.org.

creating assessment programs that provide feedback that tangibly improve a department's program and engage the entire faculty in the assessment process.

Candace Young emphasized that departments should start slowly by using existing data. Once departments develop their own data to augment assessment, they should keep things relatively simple and should focus on topics of interest to faculty. Once fully realized, an assessment regime should include internal and external measures as well as both direct and indirect measures. Keeping assessment relatively simple and focused on faculty interests, by giving faculty ownership of the process, and by framing assessment in such a way

that it blends improvement and accountability, increases chances of successful implementation.

Many Strategies and Techniques Are Available for Departments

We reviewed various approaches to getting started, but the importance of selecting an approach and actually getting started was a sustained point throughout the conference. A common theme was that any strategy has to be tailored to a department's specific circumstances and needs. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Michelle Deardorff and Paul Folger suggested that the