2006 Workshop for Department Chairs—Planning for Assessment and Accountability Issues

The 2006 Workshop for Department Chairs, held at the Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, focused on the theme of "Planning for Assessment and Accountability Issues." Moderated by Stephen Majeski, chair, department of political science, University of Washington, and of the APSA Departmental Services Committee, the session included presentations by four speakers with notable experience on this topic: Kerstin Hamann, University of Central Florida; Michelle Deardorf, Jackson State University; Ken Campbell, University of Delaware; Linda Suskie, Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Kerstin Hamann and Michelle Deardorf have been very active on assessment-related issues (in their departments and in the APSA Conference on Teaching & Learning), and Ken Campbell has been the University of Delaware department's point person on a recent planning effort on assessment. All three were able to share their unique perspectives on the theme at the individual and departmental levels, while Linda Suskie was able to provide a broad conceptualization of the issue and share her insights in what accrediting bodies look for and the resources they can provide.

The presentations were followed by a lively Q&A with the 53 department chairs in attendance. To convey the substance of the presentation to the wider audience of APSA members, each workshop speaker has helpfully summarized their presentation in the following set of articles. I encourage you to contact them directly with specific questions on their perspective on assessment, as well as to contact us here at APSA (dsp@apsanet.org) with any comments or suggestions.

The topic for the 2007 Workshop for Department Chairs will be announced via *PS* and the APSA department chairs' eNewsletter this spring.—Bahram M. Rajaee, APSA Director, International & External Relations

Assessment Advice for Beginners

—**Kenneth J. Campbell,**
University of Delaware

There is a great deal of unnecessary confusion out there about assessment of student learning. The theories are inconsistent, the processes are overly complex, and the advice is contradictory. There are national assessment experts telling us what to do, discipline-specific assessment experts telling us what to do, and institution-based assessment experts telling us what to do. And they all seem to speak a different language. The one point on which they all seem to agree is that we have to begin doing it; no more stalling.

The national push for assessment of student learning in higher education has met with a variety of reactions in political science departments across the country, ranging from cynical hostility to blithe acquiescence. Some (usually research-university faculty) see the current emphasis on assessment as a "passing fad" to be "waited out," while others (usually liberal arts-college faculty) embrace it as an "opportunity" to improve teaching through the cultivation of a "culture of assessment." Generally speaking, the discipline of political science is still in the embryonic stage of the assessment life cycle. Nursing, on the other hand, is years ahead of us. Largely driven by licensing and certification issues, nursing had to be at the vanguard of assessment. Does this mean that we, in political science, must now run to catch up? Not necessarily.

For political science departments just beginning to develop an assessment plan, my strategic advice is to split the difference between the Pollyannaish optimists and the curmudgeonly skeptics. Assessment is coming, whether we like it or not, but a first assessment plan must be built carefully, not "embraced" idealistically. The greatest dangers for beginners are either not taking assessment seriously enough and doing too little of real value, or being too ambitious and trying to do too much in the first plan. Both seem to me to be recipes for failure.

While it is true that the national pressure for assessment of student learning in higher education is politically motivated, it is also true that assessment, done right, can improve our teaching and our students' learning. We in academia are being offered the chance to develop and control the assessment process within our departments, colleges, and universities. However, if we do not do it, someone else will do it for us, and we will almost assuredly not like the result. At this point, regional accreditation agencies are insisting that we demonstrate good assessment practices. But we would be wise to shift the dynamic from *assessment under duress* to *assessment for improvement.* For departments completely new to assessment, this must be done modestly. Learn to crawl before you walk; walk before you try to run.

Keep the first assessment plan simple, short, practical, and effective. Choose only three or four "learning outcomes" (not 10 or 15), such as critical thinking, good communication skills, and demonstrated knowledge of key concepts in political science. Develop a couple of measurement tools for each learning goal. Direct measures (e.g., exams) are preferred by the accrediting agencies over indirect measures (e.g., surveys). Tailor your plan to your department's particular conditions. If you have the time and resources to involve the entire faculty in the development of this first plan, this is certainly preferable, as the faculty will immediately feel "ownership." If, however, your department is overextended, as so many are in this era of political-science popularity among undergraduate majors, then perhaps an assessment committee and/or an assessment "fellow" in your department is more appropriate. In any case, your college or university administration, if serious about assessment, must provide your department additional resources and/or release time so you can learn about assessment and to develop a serious and successful first plan.

Finally, and this is a most important point, the cycle of assessment must be completed by interpreting the results of your chosen measurement devices and using those results to further improve your teaching. Simply reporting the results of assessment may satisfy the cynics in your department, but it will displease the accrediting body, waste your time and effort, and squander a great opportunity to improve your teaching.

Note

* For further information about simple, practical assessment, see Linda Suskie, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2004).

Methods of Effectively Leveraging Departmental Assessment Programs

—Michelle D. Deardorff,
Jackson State University

Our collective experience as academics has led us to fear that departmental assessment plans will just sit on some anonymous shelf; our hard work will disappear into the black hole of administrative demands; and the lack of university response will become one more chip on our faculty's shoulders as yet another example of wasted effort. The question thus facing the departmental chair is: How do we ensure that our work benefits our programs? In other words, how do we make mandated assessment plans meaningful?

Establishing Departmental "Buy-In"

It is clear from the assessment literature that there is no single way to create a good assessment plan. The process and structure should reflect the needs and idiosyncrasies of both institutional and departmental communities. Such factors as the percentage of tenured versus non-tenured faculty members in the department, the balance between recent hires accustomed to assessment and more cynical faculty members who have been through multiple university strategic planning cycles, and whether the university has a culture of assessment inform the strategies the chair must utilize in implementing assessment plans. For example, if a university or college has a culture of non-assessment—forms are filled out, reports are filed, but decisions still appear to be arbitrary and not based on the aforementioned reports—a department chair should not pressure her department to comply with assessment with the justification that the department will receive external benefits. This approach, on the other hand, would be very effective in a university with a culture of assessment, where well-implemented assessment plans result in additional faculty lines and departmental resources.

One way of garnering departmental investment in these programs is to demonstrate to faculty how they can benefit from assessment. However, every department will differ as to their triggering issues (AAHE 1992). For example, members of a department may be curious to discover why their students are not going to law school as frequently as in the past. To answer this question they consider LSAT score and matriculation patterns, review the performance of their majors compared to other majors in the university, analyze contributing alterations in the department over the years, and determine how their program differs from others that appear to be more successful. These findings allow them to make adjustments designed to improve the success rates of their students' law school applications. In other political science departments, the salient issue may be to improve the caliber of graduate students entering the program or enhance students' ability to serve as competent research assistants. Regardless of the issue, the key is to find an assessment outcome in which faculty members are invested.

A second approach is to give individuals responsibility for reviewing and analyzing one element of the raw data collected for program review (e.g., one writes a brief report scrutinizing the results of a majors survey, another examines publication patterns of the department relative to student credit hours generated). In undergraduate programs, it is useful to integrate some of the survey development and interpretation into methods (and other) courses. This lightens the load on the faculty, provides practical experience for the students, and engages students in the process of assessment. This process may, in some institutions, be of similar value with graduate students.

The key to establishing buy-in is leadership from the departmental chair. The chair must see the potential of assessment in improving quality teaching, research outcomes, and student engagement, as well as departmental quality—regardless of the administrative response. If the chair does not see the transformative potential of assessment, it will be very difficult to convince the department.

Importance of Connections with Administration

Similarly, it is important to encourage university officials to commit to the change and potential of the department (AAHE 1992; Banta et al. 1996; Palomba and Banta 1999). By building bridges to different administrative offices and illustrating departmental support for university objectives (increasing enrollment, meeting financial need, assessing programs), administrators will be more willing to work with the department to solve these problems. The initiative for change then rests on the department to find a solution that meets departmental needs, as opposed to having solutions pressed upon faculty by administrators. One example we all face is the pressure for accreditation self-study in the years immediately prior to the evaluation. When the administration-driven assessment push begins on campus, the wise department will have already done this in a fashion that *helped the political science program.* This department is less likely to be subjected to a "cookie-cutter," "one-size-fits-all" approach to assessment.

After the assessment process, the department will have the evidence necessary to assist in the increasingly data-driven decision making of administrators. For example, departments can demonstrate the comparative inexpensiveness of political science by highlighting higher student satisfaction ratings on national surveys by political science majors, or of the department's intellectual rigor through the positive impact of political science courses on the university's critical thinking objectives. In times of budget shortfalls and belt-tightening, this documented evidence may assist the department more than all the self-professed claims of "rigor" and "excellence" (which hopefully they can now demonstrate).

Closing the Feedback Loop: Change Based on Assessment

Assessment helps very little if the information does not influence decision-making processes or determinations. Carefully developed reports that reside in a binder have no real impact, are of limited value, and are wasteful. However, even if no one outside of the department examines the data, the department can benefit if it learns from the assessment process and discusses its findings. The department (and the chair) must be committed to using the assessment findings to impact the graduate or undergraduate curriculum, departmental policies, or other aspects of departmental life. Assessment can improve the way we work. Its findings should inform future departmental decisions and encourage faculty to bring the same inquiring mind to their teaching and university life as they do to their research. If, annually, the department discusses what has been discovered through assessment and plans the alterations to be made in response, than the assessment process will have been leveraged for the good of the department, not for the external audiences that may have compelled it.

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Palomba, Catherine A., and T. W. Banta. 1999. *Assessment Essentials.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Presentation for Chairs' Workshop on Assessment, APSA 2006

—**Kerstin Hamann,**
University of Central Florida

Assessment is increasingly present on many campuses, and as state legislatures, parents, employers, and accreditation agencies continue to ask for documentation of what students learn at college, it is not likely to go away in the near future. How, then, do we know what our students learn? How can we demonstrate that they do learn, and what they learn?

Assessment of undergraduate programs is perhaps most difficult when a department's identity is centered on graduate education and research. How can department chairs charged with undergraduate program assessment in a university culture that emphasizes research and graduate education over teaching undergraduates convince faculty that assessment is a useful exercise rather than just an additional chore that eats into departmental resources? I suggest there are at least four ways in which assessment can have positive aspects for a department even when the departmental focus is not on undergraduate teaching:

1. If one of the goals of the undergraduate program is to enhance its reputation by sending its best students to prestigious graduate programs, assessment could promote this goal by producing systematic placement data. These data could not just be used to recruit and attract new outstanding undergraduates, but also as a first step to assess how more graduating majors could be sent to first-rate graduate programs.

2. Oftentimes, faculty members under research pressure rely on graduate students to assist with research tasks. Departmental assessment could help identify ways to enhance undergraduates' research skills, thus providing them with an overall better education in their major, and enabling them to provide additional assistance to either the professors themselves or work in teams with graduate students. This research experience would not just benefit the professors, but might also increase the students' competitive edge for gaining acceptance into top graduate programs.

3. If program assessment relies partially on classroom assessment, professors would benefit from an incentive to analyze what students learned in their undergraduate classes. Giving some credit to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) according to the teacher-scholar model, where research on student learning in the classroom is assessed systematically and published in peer-reviewed journals, might provide this incentive and also assist new faculty members in pursuing tenure and promotion.

4. Annual assessment data and documentation on how departments have pursued improvement of the program are useful when the department is going through the periodic program review cycle in place in many colleges and universities. These data can often be used and included in larger periodic program reviews.

The bottom line is that assessment of an undergraduate program can be beneficial not just to undergraduate education itself, but can also support other departmental goals if it is viewed as an integral part of the overall departmental mission.

In sum, while assessment of undergraduate programs can be conducted in many different ways without incurring prohibitive costs or taking up too much of faculty members' time, it is important that the goals of assessment meet the overall departmental mission or objectives. Thus, defining the assessment goals of the undergraduate program in line with a department's emphasis on graduate education and research could enhance the department's identity rather than distract from its focus. On the other hand, if undergraduate education is a primary goal of the department, that would, of course, also be reflected in the underlying objectives of assessment. My point here is simply that assessment of an undergraduate program can benefit departments even if undergraduate education is not a primary focus.

Furthermore, as undergraduate program assessment is used by higher administration to assess departments rather than students, it is useful to keep a few things in mind when defining objectives for assessment:

- It is generally useful to target the areas that are particularly important to your program, where you can show what your program does, and maybe identify how this can be done even better.
- It might also be useful to emphasize the significance of the discipline within college education. When resources are scarce, administration sometimes looks to identify programs of low priority. Thus, it is important to demonstrate the contribution of your program to the university and society at large. In other words, what does your program do, or do better, than other programs or disciplines in your college or university?

Another important consideration relates to the resources needed to conduct meaningful assessment. Some questions to ask when planning assessment include, for example:

- What will be the cost? Will there be resources available from sources outside the department or will the department need to pay all expenses?
- Who will oversee and conduct the assessment process? Will there be compensation or rewards for faculty who spend time on departmental or program assessment?

If additional resources for assessment are limited, some low-cost options include:

- Using existing data: Many colleges and universities have assessment offices that can make useful data available to programs, such as student demographics, enrollment patterns, graduation rates, or future career plans. Often, these offices also administer exit surveys to graduating seniors. It might be possible for departments to add program-specific questions at no extra cost.
- Using student work that is already available, such as projects from capstone courses, research projects, term papers, etc., to assess what students have learned.
- Especially in large programs, using samples of students might be easier than attempting to collect data from all students. This can also be a good alternative if nationally normed reference tests, such as the ETS Field Test, are used. Using samples allows for keeping the costs for these tests down.

- Encourage faculty members to assess their courses by giving credit for SoTL articles for promotion and tenure and research records; course assessment can then be built into the program assessment plan.
- Online courses provide a wealth of data stored in electronic format, e.g., discussions, quizzes, student participation (engagement).

In sum, regardless of whether the assessment process is done as a compliance exercise or primarily driven by the department and the faculty, it can—and should—be useful to the department and to the educational endeavor. Assessment should demonstrate student learning knowledge and skill development, and identify a roadmap of how to improve learner outcomes in the future.

Some Thoughts and Suggestions on Assessing Student Learning

—Linda Suskie,
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Pressure to assess student learning more carefully and systematically is clearly mounting. Federal and state agencies are increasingly calling for solid, compelling evidence of student learning, while higher education leaders are challenging faculty to improve the quality of curricula and pedagogies. Efforts to assess student learning thus serve two ends: one, to demonstrate the worth of our programs to external constituents and, two, to inform our understanding of the effectiveness of our teaching strategies.

In response to these forces, faculty today are grappling with understanding the nature, methodology, and value of assessment. Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature on the assessment of student learning in higher education, and the emphasis is on simple, flexible approaches. The assessment process begins by clearly articulating expected student learning outcomes: what faculty expect students (both political science majors and those taking political science courses as part of a general education core) to be able to do upon graduation. Encouraging faculty to discuss their aims and arriving at some common ground may be one of the greatest benefits of the assessment process, and one that the American Political Science Association can encourage through continued cross-institutional dialogue. The discussion can then move to reviewing the curriculum to ensure that every student, regardless of the particular courses or tracks he or she elects, has sufficient opportunity to achieve those goals. Again, this discussion can be of great benefit to the faculty and can be promoted by APSA through cross-institutional dialogue.

Once goals for student learning are in place, the assessment process itself can begin by compiling and systematically reviewing evidence of student learning of those goals. Often this evidence is already at hand in the form of student papers, tests, projects, surveys, and/or evaluations by field experience supervisors. The process of program-level assessment entails examining this information from a new angle, evaluating not just individual students' performance but also the effectiveness of curricula and pedagogies revealed by examining this evidence holistically. A tally of faculty ratings of student papers using a rating scale or rubric, for example, might indicate that, while students' writing skills are generally very good, their ability to analyze and synthesize the sources they have identified is disappointing. Faculty can use this information to launch a discussion on strategies to improve students' skills in analyzing and synthesizing research sources and then try out these strategies in their courses.

Effective assessment is thus not an intrusive burden but an opportunity to provide students with an even better education than they are now receiving. The key to a successful assessment effort is therefore to foster an institutional climate that prizes not only assessment efforts but also efforts to improve teaching. A campus with a thriving assessment program values efforts to assess student learning and improve teaching in a number of ways:

- Assessment results inform important decisions. If a department finds that its students have inadequate technology skills, for example, the institution makes an effort to fund the hardware or software needed to improve their skills.
- Innovation and risk-taking are encouraged. Faculty are encouraged, for example, to address disappointing assessment results with new pedagogies, even if those innovations may lead to temporary declines in end-of-course evaluations.
- Assessment efforts are valued in promotion and tenure decisions. The work of a professor who develops a new approach to teaching American government, validates the effectiveness of the new approach through careful assessment, and publishes the results in a respected peer-reviewed journal is valued as much as that of the professor who publishes more traditional research.
- The burden of assessment is eased as much as possible, through support from both the institution and from the American Political Science Association. While an institution can provide coordination, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities, the APSA can develop a clearinghouse of model curricula, statements of expected student learning outcomes, and assessment tools such as rubrics and surveys.

For more information on assessing student learning in higher education, the following readings are recommended:

Angelo, T. A., and K. P. Cross. 1993. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers, 2nd ed.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Huba, M. E., and J. E. Freed. 2000. *Learner-centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Leskes, A., and B. Wright. 2005. *The Art and Science of Assessing General Education Outcomes: A Practical Guide.* Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. 2003. *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources.* Philadelphia: Author.

Palomba, C. A., and T. W. Banta. 1999. *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, Improving.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Walvoord, B. E. 2004. *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Kenneth J. Campbell is associate professor of political science and international relations and director of the International Relations Program at the University of Delaware. His academic areas of specialization are American foreign policy, international security, contemporary genocide, and global governance.

Michelle D. Deardorff is associate professor in the department of political science at Jackson State University. She is chair of the APSA's Political Science Education organized section and editor of the *Political Science Educator,* the section's newsletter.

Kerstin Hamann serves as the Graduate Coordinator for the department of political science at the University of Central Florida. Her research interests lie in Comparative Politics with a focus on comparative political economy, comparative industrial relations, and contemporary Spanish politics.

Linda Suskie is vice president of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and past director of the American Association for Higher Education's Assessment Forum.

Internationalizing Public Policy Courses

—Mark Cassell,
Kent State University

> "If our founding fathers had wanted us to care about the rest of the world, they wouldn't have declared our independence from it."
>
> "If it [international issue] was important, it would have happened here."
>
> —Stephen Colbert, *The Colbert Report*

Stephen Colbert's provocative claims offer a starting point to consider whether and how to broaden the international perspective within undergraduate public policy courses and curriculum. This article discusses whether an absence of international perspectives within public policy courses should be a concern, considers an alternative framework for incorporating a broader international perspective into an introduction to public policy course, and identifies potential assignments and pedagogical tools.

Two observations are important to underscore before proceeding further. First, the information developed here is not based upon a comprehensive assessment of public policy courses, texts, or departments at U.S. and foreign universities. The analysis is based on more limited sources of information: a review of several popular public policy textbooks; Internet searches of public policy syllabi; responses to requests for information posted on several public policy listservs; and, finally, on my own experience teaching public policy at Kent State University, a medium-sized public research university located in Ohio.

Second, broadening the international perspective within public policy courses or policy curricula is not a trivial task. Setting aside the issues regarding learning new material or squeezing new material into an already full semester still leaves the theoretical problem of deciding what to include or where to begin. Once one decides to internationalize a policy course, it is not always clear which countries or supra-national organizations to include or omit. And, because of the way in which political science as a discipline is organized, incorporating a greater international perspective in public policy courses requires that colleagues in the department (and the university) put aside concerns about academic turf; a prerequisite that is often difficult to achieve even under the best circumstances.

Notwithstanding these concerns, I offer the following thoughts about internationalizing public policy courses.

Is there a Problem? How are International Perspectives Included in Public Policy Courses?

It is not at all obvious that there is a problem. First, some might argue that learning how public policy develops and is implemented in the U.S. is enough of a challenge. Why complicate it with other countries or systems? And second, the most assigned policy textbooks already include some cases and examples with an international focus. Perhaps we already incorporate enough of an international perspective.

The first point—whether public policy should encompass a more international focus—is a question of values. In a world where national boundaries are increasingly permeable, it is important to take proactive steps to develop and enhance our students' understanding of transnational influences, policy diffusion, and policy processes within international or supra-national organizations.

The second point is more complicated. To begin to understand how international perspectives are incorporated in public policy courses, I conducted an Internet search of public policy syllabi using Google's search engine. I reviewed the top 30 syllabi that came up after typing "'Introduction to Public Policy' and 'Syllabus,'" and I reviewed several of the most assigned public policy textbooks.

In reviewing course syllabi, I find that policy courses use a mix of two general approaches to teach public policy. The first follows a so-called textbook model of the policymaking process, with the course divided into stages or steps in the policymaking process: problem definition, agenda setting, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. A second approach is organized around specific policy areas such as housing, defense, or the environment. Most policy courses combine both approaches while emphasizing one over the other. Missing from the syllabi were references to policies in other countries or to how globalization might change or influence policy processes in the U.S.

The textbooks share a similar mixed approached to public policy, emphasizing the policy process or specific policy areas. To the extent non-U.S. policies are given attention it is in the context of a case or an example primarily used to underscore a point about the U.S. system. There is little context, for example, for why Germany or the EU might adopt different policies than the U.S. Nor do the texts devote much attention to how an increasingly global society and more interdependent political world change the policy process.

Imagining an Internationalized Public Policy Syllabus

Scholars of comparative political economy have demonstrated the importance of ideas, institutions, and interests in understanding cross-national differences in policymaking as well as the impact of globalization on traditional domestic policymaking processes. The classic approach to decision making as either rational policy analysis or formal political process has been examined and modified in many important ways by a myriad of authors, many of whom take institutions, interests, and ideas into account.

I propose an alternative framework: to organize public policy courses around a matrix combining the strengths of the process approach with the insights of comparative policy scholars (see Figure 1). The steps in the policy process rest on one axis of the matrix, and ideas, interest, and institutions reside on the second axis. Combining the stages in the policy process with a particular theoretical focus provides leverage to internationalize a policy course without it feeling forced or added on. Moreover, each of the cells is associated with a well-developed body of scholarly research, case studies, and news stories.

The framework permits the introduction of a wider range of concepts than those generally used in process-oriented texts (for example, political culture, corporatism, or complex interdependence) in order to trace their influence on national or transnational policymaking. Likewise, it allows for the comparison of related concepts—for example, interests are variously depicted as policy communities (Walker 1989; Kingdon 1995), policy networks (Rhodes and Marsh 1992), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), interest groups (Cobb and Elder 1983), and issue networks (Heclo 1978). These configurations vary by country, by policy type, and by what they purport to explain. The framework also works as a structure to teach about the influence globalization has on traditional policy structures and processes.

To give an example, ideas and problem definition form a cell in the matrix that allows exploration of how different cultural understandings of family and gender help explain why a lack of childcare options is

Figure 1: Theoretical Foundations/Stages Matrix

		Theoretical Foundations		
		Ideas	Institutions	Interests
Stages	Problem Definition			
	Agenda Setting			
	Decision-Making			
	Implementation			
	Evaluation			

a problem in one country and not another (Adler 1997). Alternatively, the cell that combines the implementation stage with institutions allows consideration of why public sector reforms such as contracting or pay-for-performance plays out differently in different countries (Cassell 2002).

Most undergraduate policy courses are unlikely to cover all 15 cells in a single semester (without incurring the wrath of students). The framework offers a theoretical roadmap to introduce or enhance an international perspective within an already existing public policy course. One could apply the framework to a two-semester course or alternatively use it as a basis for revising a public policy curriculum.

In short, an idealized version of the policy process doesn't reveal the divisions and tensions—what Lieberman (2002) has recently called the "friction"—between different institutions and competing ideas. While formal political processes are a good starting point for examining policy, they often omit the important factors that enhance student understanding of public policy and national variations. The framework offers a potential remedy. The next section turns to a list of assignments and exercises that policy instructors have used to internationalize their policy courses.

Assignments that Help Internationalize Public Policy[1]

The research paper. In some cases, papers summarize and synthesize literature from different national contexts. In other cases, students analyze a policy area comparatively. One faculty member broadened the international perspective of her class by actively recruiting and pairing foreign students with U.S. students in the presentation portion of the research assignment.

Writing up a case study. Several faculty assign students to write up a case study. In one notable example, students are asked to write a case study of a public organization and examine how globalization influences the organization's performance and capacity to deliver public or collective goods.

Using a case study written by others. A number of faculty suggested utilizing case studies written by others as way to broaden policy students' perspective. The Kennedy School (www.ksgcase.harvard.edu/), the Electronic Hallway (https://hallway.org/) run out of the University of Washington, and the Pew Case Study Program at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service offer a wealth of case study resources.

Tracking policy issues in foreign media. Students are asked to identify and track policy issues covered in foreign newspapers. Reports on the coverage include information about how the issue is presented, the "frame" or narrative used to tell the story, what's missing or left out, and whether the issue is covered broadly or narrowly. A variation on this assignment compares coverage to examine agenda setting cross-nationally.

Briefing papers. Several faculty suggested a variation on the briefing paper or policy memo. In one case, students are asked to write a policy briefing paper to be presented to a hypothetical decision maker or decision-making body. The assignment enables students to research issues that are meaningful to them, their classmates are exposed to issues from around the world, and students learn how to write policy briefing papers that are targeted to a particular decision maker.

Tracking political institutions in other countries. Students track the daily news of a majority or minority party speaker/leader in the legislature in a chosen country, or the work of a minister or the chief executive. The purpose is to give perspective on the range of competing priorities and pressures that any participant in the process faces at any given time. In other cases, students compare the web site of political parties and interest groups in different countries.

Election simulations. Students go through a mock election simulation under differing electoral conditions. The aim of the exercise is to discuss how election rules shape the types of public policies that make it on the agenda.

Notes

* I wish to thank Karen Mossberger and Frank Lebo for their help in pulling together information used in this paper.

1. The information was gathered in two ways. First, I searched the web for public policy syllabi with assignments that were geared toward undergraduates and which encouraged students to think outside an American context. This web search differed from the previous search in that the focus here was to identify courses with particular types of assignments. This often meant looking for courses with "Comparative-" or "Global-Public Policy" in the title. I also posted a query on the Association for Public Policy and Management (APPAM) and the Public Policy (PUBPOL-L) listservs asking for suggestions on teaching public policy in a way that encourages more global or international thinking.

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Internationalizing Political Theory Courses

—Isis Leslie,
Georgetown University

(Mis)Understanding Others

On March 28, 2006, the following televised exchange took place between two professors at Al-Azhar University in Egypt and the station newscaster for Kuwaiti Al-Rai TV on the subject of female circumcision:

> *Interviewer:*
> So what about the . . . opinion [of the girl who will be circumcised]? What if she says: I don't want to be circumcised. What happens then?
>
> *Dr. Muhammed Wahdan:*
> If a girl says she doesn't want it, she's free. No problem.
>
> *Interviewer:*
> Is this what happens in reality?
>
> *Dr. Muhammed Wahdan:*
> I have no relation to reality. I am talking about the way things should be.[1]

Most of us, as U.S.-trained political scientists, are unable to make sense of Professor Wahdan's claim. What can he mean to vehemently assert in the middle of a political debate that he has no relation to reality?[2] With no training in Islamic political theoretic assumptions, or the impact of the neo-Platonic denigration of the actual on Islamic thought, we are neither able to decipher Professor Wahdan's claim, nor to render his point comprehensible to our students. We are equally unfamiliar with the Islamic doctrines that inform this worldview,[3] as summarized by Yusuf Umar (2003): "Theological reason in Islam limits itself to the talk of interpreting the present in light of an ideal [Quranic] community in the past. The present is always confronted as a deviation from the ideal."

Without training in Islamic political thought and history we cannot fulfill our responsibility as political scientists to foster transcultural competence in our students. We can neither aid in comprehension of historical events, such as the nineteenth-century Sudanese revolt against the British that was ideologically fueled by the Doctrine of the Hidden Imam, nor foster understanding of contemporary political realities, such as the pressure Shi'a Islam places on secular states to conform to Shari'a law, principles, and precepts, while rejecting secular states' claims to legitimacy (Umar 2003).

The State of Political Theory

Judging from a general survey of syllabi of introductory political theory courses, the critical training we as a discipline are offering our students in political theory is almost exclusively Western. Standard courses in political theory commonly include readings in the Greek tragedies, Plato, Aristotle, sometimes Augustine, less often Aquinas, usually Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Rawls, occasionally Marx, sometimes Hume, Nietzsche, Foucault, etc. In general, these courses could appropriately be renamed Political Thought in the Western Tradition. These courses are what we were taught, and what we teach our students, and we have a lot of students.

Between 1991 and 2001, over 400,000 baccalaureate degrees were awarded to majors in political science, and a sizably larger number of non-majors enroll in and are exposed to discussions in political science classes. In our current global context, it is critical that Western college graduates, particularly in political science, understand more than the nature and history of neo-liberal capitalism that is generally taught in political science courses in the U.S. Such limited training is inadequate. This generation of students, and their instructors, should have the ability to understand the cultures and contexts with which the global market places us all in contact. It is incumbent upon the discipline to cultivate transcultural competence in our students and instructors so that we are able to decipher political speech across cultural boundaries.

Classroom Aims

Not only should additional materials be taught, but these materials should be taught with a far more international approach than they currently are. So, what can be done differently in the classroom? The following sections offer some possibilities that correspond to the period organization of most political theory courses.

The Ancients

Political theory instructors can place assigned readings in international perspective, beginning with the earliest canonical texts. Eduard Meyer (1995), for instance, addresses the visit of Herodotus to Egypt, underscoring how understanding Egyptian thought is critical to understanding that of the Greeks. While Plato's *Timaes* and *Critias* explicitly mention Plato's visit to Egypt, the importance of the Egyptians to Greek civilization is rarely, if ever, mentioned in traditional political theory courses. Furthermore, the extensive debates on the influence of Egyptian culture on Greek thought since the publication of *Black Athena* typically go unmentioned as well, despite the availability of numerous articles that outline these debates (Meyer 1995). Classroom examinations of debates surrounding the comparative and influential relationship of Greek to Egyptian thought would contextualize canonical texts in a broader global context. Moreover, at the very least, a substantive explanation is in order in introductory courses of why political theory courses begin with the Greeks, rather than the Egyptians, or sub-Saharan African thought.

An internationalist approach to classical material in political theory may also consider scholarship on African oral traditions in relation to the oral traditions on which the tragedies are based, as well as in relation to the Socratic oral tradition. Segun Gbadegesin argues in *African Philosophy* that "communal wisdom derives from ongoing critical debate and rational inquiry among individuals, which is only later popularly formulated and remembered and perhaps unquestioningly, as oral tradition" (Presby 2001, 12).Gbadegesin's analysis reverses the customary view of oral traditions as deficient in critical rationality. His reevaluation of those traditions can enrich classroom discussions of folklore as expressed in the tragedies, and the nature of philosophical political thought.

Introducing into the classroom treatments of oral traditions in African thought, including those of Gbadegesin, Teodros Kiros, Gail Presby, and Claude Sumner, would enrich our study of the nature of the Socratic tradition and inform analyses of how, if at all, knowledge cre-