

Academic Program Review of the
Department of Political Science/Public Administration
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Prepared by the Academic Program Review Subcommittee:

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BACKGROUND:

The Department of Political Science/Public Administration (Pol/PA) resides in the College of Liberal Studies. The Department has nine instructional FTE and offers majors and minors in both Political Science and Public Administration. Political Science has averaged about 182 majors and 60 graduates/year in recent years, while Public Administration has averaged about 52 majors and 23 graduates/year. The Department also administers the Pre-law program, which is available to students from any major on campus.

The Program submitted its self-study to the Dean's office in the spring of 2006, and an external reviewer (Dr. Tracey Gladstone-Sovell) visited in the fall 2006. The Departmental response to the external review and the Dean's comments were completed in the spring of 2007.

SUMMARY OF THE SELF-STUDY:

APR's summary of how the academic program attempts to reach its goals and objectives and the extent to which those goals and objectives have been achieved

The primary mission of Pol/PA is high quality undergraduate education for the Department's majors and minors, and in general education and service courses for other programs. Additionally, Pol/PA wants to "create a climate that stimulates student learning, thinking, scholarship and professional development for students, faculty and the community".

These goals are achieved by having dedicated faculty members who are responsive to trends in their field, assessment data and past program review. More specifically, the faculty members have demonstrated high quality instruction while providing valuable learning experiences through undergraduate research, internships, and the Mock Trial and Model United Nations programs.

Notable strengths and weaknesses of the program:

The Department of Political Science/Public Administration appears to be a cohesive department with a strong commitment to undergraduate education, a solid history of scholarship and an impressive record of service to the university and community. Notable

strengths of the Department include the aforementioned internship, Mock Trial and Model UN Programs that provide many students with great opportunities to enhance their learning in a hands-on environment. Additional strengths of the Department include an effective advising program and strong record of getting Pol/PA majors and minors into Law School. The Department also has a long history of receiving high SEI scores.

Areas of concern for the Department of Political Science/Public Administration include assessment, resources, and strategic planning. In recent years the Department has made significant strides to improve assessment of student learning. However, further progress is needed. Resources, as the external reviewer notes, are “barely sufficient to meet the needs of the Department”. In particular, funding for faculty travel and programs such as Mock Trial and Model UN (where students compete on a regional or national scale) is precarious and needs to be more stable. With several coming retirements and possible growth with the Growth, Quality and Access plan, the Department needs to continue with strategic planning to anticipate future trends in the field and to hire wisely.

APR comments on particular components of the self-study:

Curriculum: The Department’s Political Science program is typical of others in the country. However, the additional presence of the Public Administration program is fairly unique and distinctive.

The Department is to be commended on recent curriculum changes made to keep up with trends in the discipline and to improve assessment. In recent years the Department has added new courses in health and environmental policy and health administration. Additionally, a research methods course has been shifted from an elective to a required course for all Pol/PA majors, and a required senior capstone course has been introduced.

Assessment of Student Learning and Degree of Program Success: The Department has worked to improve their assessment of student learning and needs to continue this improvement. As previously mentioned, a required senior capstone course has been put in place. This will be a great tool for furthering assessment of student learning. The Department plans to develop assessment instruments for use in this course. **The APR committee felt that the Mission Statements for Political Science and Public Administration could be clarified. Clarification of the mission statements should precede attempts to clarify learning outcomes, which the Department, external reviewer and Dean all agree is needed. A learning outcome such as “300-400 level students will use journals and scholarly books” is vague and needs elaboration.**

The Department can also improve their assessment of program success. They do track student success in getting into graduate or law school, but other tracking of success is limited. For example, what percentage of graduates get jobs in their chosen field? Development of an alumni survey would provide solid assessment of the program’s success. The development of an exit survey (which the department plans to do) for the Capstone course will also provide measures of program success.

The external review does outline reasonable steps to gradually develop better assessment tools. The Department would do well to follow these steps. However, as the Department develops assessment tools and implements them, they do need to be sure that there is a commitment to reviewing and responding to the assessment data they will collect. The Department has indicated that they meet yearly to discuss assessment. This is good, but as the data comes in perhaps more meetings or the formation of an assessment subcommittee will be needed.

Previous Academic Program Review and New Program Initiatives: Pol/PA was reviewed last in 1999. The recommendations and responses were:

1. The new hire should be used, where possible, to relieve the student and course overload in General Education courses and the capstone course

Response: New hires were used to relieve the student and course overload in General Education.

2. While the Department is professionally active as a whole, the efforts are not equally distributed among faculty members. It appears that a small number of faculty have done little since last review. Faculty members who are less active in research and service should be teaching heavier loads in order to give relief to faculty who are active in these pursuits. More extensive grant writing should be pursued. The Department should encourage a high level of quality in teaching, scholarship and service for all faculty.

Response: Faculty members less active in research do have heavier teaching loads. Additionally, these faculty members are very active in service and in the Mock Trial and Model UN programs. In the future, as several faculty members retire, the new hires will be expected to be active in scholarship.

3. There are no specifics listed for student internships and research. This (especially undergraduate research) seems to be a trend that is upon us. Has the Department taken measures to encourage these activities?

Response: Internships are required for the PA majors and undergraduate research is encouraged by requiring all Pol and PA majors to take Pol 361: Research Methods. There has also been a successful effort to encourage students to apply for UWL Undergraduate Research awards.

Personnel: A major issue facing the Department is the expected retirement of 1-3 faculty members in the next five years. The Department, external reviewer and Dean all agree on the necessity for strategic planning to identify needs in the Department and trends in the field so that the Department moves in the right direction with the new hires. The Dean indicated that the College does fund planning retreats for departments

following their Academic Program Review. The Department should accept the Dean's offer.

Related to the turnover in the Department is a concern that there may be difficulty in recruiting talented faculty due to limited resources. The Department and College Office need to work together and be creative and aggressive in putting together attractive packages to attract high quality faculty to the Department.

Support for achieving Academic Program Goals (Resources): The Department does have a number of concerns regarding resources. Foremost among those is the need for classroom modernization. Only one of three classrooms assigned to the Department is technology equipped. Additionally, increases in the Supplies and Equipment budget and funding for travel are needed. Another major resource concern is funding for the Mock Trial and Model UN programs. Since some of the support for these distinctive programs is raised through the UWL Foundation, a more stable source of funding is needed. The Dean agrees that resources for the Department are too limited.

COMMENTS ON EXTERNAL REVIEWER/DEPARTMENT RESPONSE/DEAN'S LETTER:

Comments from the external reviewer, the department response and Dean's letter have been included throughout this review.

One additional concern, voiced in the Dean's letter, is a need for increased diversity in the Department – in the curriculum, outreach to the community and composition of the faculty. The Dean suggests that the Department examine this matter in upcoming strategic planning meetings.

APR'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Department of Political Science/Public Administration should submit a Progress Report detailing progress with respect to assessment (Recommendation #1) in three years. Otherwise, the program should undergo its next Academic Program Review in the next regularly scheduled cycle. Particular areas that need to be addressed in the coming years include:

1. Improving assessment of student learning and program success. The Department should refine their Mission Statements before they progress to clarifying learning outcomes. The Department should then continue with existing plans to improve assessment, but be sure to couch these efforts in the context of their clarified learning outcomes. The Departments also needs to have mechanisms in place to collect, analyze and respond to the data.
2. Hiring wisely. The Department should accept the Dean's offer of funding a strategic planning retreat to identify needs in the Department and trends in the field. The Department and College Office also need to work together and be

creative and aggressive in putting together attractive packages to attract high quality faculty to the Department.

3. Continuing efforts to secure resources. The Department and College Office need to work to make classroom modernization and stable funding for the distinctive Mock Trial and Model UN programs a reality.