

Undergraduate Political Science Program

Oregon State University

Action Plan Following the 2015 Decennial Review

Prepared by:

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With the Assistance of the Political Science Faculty and Staff

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## INTRODUCTION

On May 11, 2015, an external review team visited the political science program and met with faculty, staff, and students. The team produced a review report, and this action plan is a response to that report.

The review team consisted of five people: Alison Dorko (an OSU graduate student), Erik Engstrom (Professor of Political Science and Director of Undergraduate Studies, UC Davis), Richard Herrera (Associate Professor of Political Science, Arizona State University), Richard Nafshun (Senior Instructor of Chemistry at OSU, and Chair of the Curriculum Council), and Stefani Dawn (Interim Director, Academic Programs, Assessment, and Accreditation at OSU).

We begin by thanking the review team for all of their time and the care and thoroughness that characterized their work. The conversations with them were very cordial, and their report is extremely thorough. We are deeply indebted to them.

We also appreciate the generally positive evaluation of our program. We are gratified by the overall recommendation that we “maintain” our program, as an indication that we are doing many things right. The report contains many specific commendations, and many of the recommendations of the review team are essentially an endorsement or encouragement of what we are already doing. This includes: the elimination of the prerequisites from most of our courses; moving some of our 400-level courses to 300-level; adding our courses to the Bacc Core and Liberal Arts Core; the creation of a career development course; and enhanced efforts at marketing our program.

The review team makes nine specific recommendations, under three broad headings:

### I. Enrollment:

1. To develop a comprehensive marketing program, including a position for a person with the skills to increase the program’s visibility.
2. To cross-list more courses in other departments.
3. To offer high-enrollment, lower-division classes.

### II. Curriculum

4. To develop an introductory course on careers in political science.
5. To evaluate the relevancy of our current courses.
6. To remove the internship requirement from the major and to introduce an experiential learning elective.

7. To investigate the lack of interest in the Environmental Politics and Policy option, and to consider reorienting it.

### III. Program Leadership

8. To have program leadership that is in residence full time.

9. To reach out to alumni, including forming an advisory board or Friends of the Program.

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND METRICS**

We organize this Action Plan so that it mirrors the organization of the reviewers' report.

### I. Enrollment

*Enrollment Goal: To attract more students to our classes.*

Recommendation 1: To develop a comprehensive marketing program, including a position for a person with the skills to increase the program's visibility.

#### **Objective 1: To develop and carry out a marketing program.**

We are already making progress toward this objective. We have formed a School of Public Policy committee that will be in charge of keeping the website up-to-date, and to include short videos and other engaging content. We will continue to send out a weekly email newsletter to majors, an effort commended by the review team. We have sent out newsletters to alumni and friends of the program.

Once the School of Public Policy (SPP) is housed in a single building, the division of labor among program and school staff will change, and redundancies will be reduced. This will make more staff time available for marketing efforts. The review team recommends creating a new position to serve this function, but we believe that we will have the capacity to achieve this objective with our current staffing, once we eliminate the duplication of responsibilities necessitated by our presence in three different buildings.

In addition, the School of Public Policy has formed a Strategic Recruitment Initiative (SRI) committee that is currently working with the marketing department of OSU's Ecampus program. In conjunction with the SRI, Ecampus is developing marketing materials for all three SPP programs (Political Science, Economics and Sociology) that will be sent via email and mail to community colleges in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Northern California. The intent is to increase awareness of the SPP programs at OSU and majors that are available both on-line and

on campus. The first of the marketing mailings will be sent out winter term 2016. All marketing material will have a unique identifier in order to assess the success of the outreach effort.

Metric: Number of “hits” on our website.

Recommendation 2: To cross-list more courses in other departments.

**Objective 2: To increase the number of non-political science students in our classes.**

The review team recommends that we cross-list courses in other departments, with the objective of increasing the number of non-political science majors in our classes. This is a double-edged sword. While it would increase the number of students in our classes, political science would not receive “credit” for students signing up for the classes under non-political science designators. With the budget model that is being introduced at OSU, this could end up hurting the program financially. Still, we are cross-listing some of our classes. For example, this year we are doing so with one class that is cross-listed with Nuclear Engineering, and another one with History.

We take the spirit of this recommendation to be that we should look for opportunities to increase the presence of students from other programs in our classes. Already, political science classes are required or recommended in many other programs across campus, particularly in areas like environmental science, natural resources, and education. We will continue to seek out opportunities to add more political science classes to other programs. In addition, we have decided to add a number of our courses to the Bacc Core and Liberal Arts Core, which should also increase the number of non-political science students in our classes. We have also decided to reach out to ROTC to renew our ties to that program.

Metric: The number of non-political science majors in our classes.

Recommendation 3: To offer high-enrollment lower-division classes.

**Objective 3: To develop high-enrollment lower-division classes.**

We are already engaged in meeting this objective. One faculty member, Rorie Solberg, has developed a course proposal for a class titled: PS 110: Governing After the Zombie Apocalypse. This will be a three-credit course aimed primarily at non-political science majors, and would satisfy the DPD Bacc Core requirement. It is designed to foster active student engagement, as they design a constitution for a post-apocalyptic world. Depending on the success of the course, we may consider developing other similar courses.

More generally, we remain concerned about our enrollment in all of our courses. The Fall 2015 course enrollment is an improvement over the last couple of years, but it remains to be seen

whether this is the beginning of a new trend. In any case, we will continuously review enrollment in all classes, and will consider eliminating courses that are persistently low-enrolling and will seek to replace them with higher-enrolling classes.

Metric: The number of high-enrollment lower-division classes offered.

Overall Enrollment Metric: The total number of students in our classes. These data will be collected by term, and compared to past terms.

## II. Curriculum

*Curriculum Goal: To maintain a rich and diverse, yet coherent, major and set of course offerings.*

Recommendation 4: To develop an introductory course on careers in political science.

### **Objective 4: To develop a course on careers and professional development.**

While the review team recommends an introductory course on careers in political science, our efforts in this area have taken a slightly different form: in cooperation with the other undergraduate programs in SPP, we are developing a 400-level course on professional development that will be offered for the first time in the Winter term 2016.

Metric: The number of students taking our professional development class.

Recommendation 5: Evaluate the relevancy of our current courses.

### **Objective 5: To evaluate the relevancy of our courses on an ongoing basis.**

The members of the political science program are keenly aware that the “relevancy” of our courses has important implications for the number of our majors and for enrollment in our classes. As noted above, we are currently in the midst of a thorough review of all aspects of the major, which has resulted in a number of curriculum proposals. We will continue to closely monitor enrollment in particular classes, and will make adjustments to our course offerings as appropriate. We are also reviewing the relevancy of the courses in each of our three major options. In addition, we plan to begin conducting exit interviews with graduating seniors, and in those interviews we will ask about their views about which classes were most relevant to their goals and objectives.

Metric: The number of courses rated as “relevant” by graduating political science majors.

Recommendation 6: To remove the internship requirement from the major and to introduce an experiential learning elective.

**Objective 6: Remove the Internship requirement from the major, and consider adding an experiential learning component.**

Last spring the political science faculty decided to remove the internship as a requirement of the major. This entailed four curriculum proposals, one for the generic major and one for each of the three options within the major. Some of these proposals are still making their way through the curriculum approval process.

In addition, the program has established an ad hoc committee to consider creating an experiential learning component to the major. It will make a proposal to the program faculty, which will consider and possibly adopt it.

Metric: The number of political science majors earning “experiential learning” credits.

Recommendation 7: To investigate the lack of interest in the Environmental Politics and Policy option, and to consider reorienting it.

**Objective 7: To reevaluate and possibly revise all three options within the major.**

While the review committee recommends taking a close look at the Environmental Politics and Policy option, all three options, we believe, now merit a close look. The options were created several years ago, so we now have several years of data and experience to draw upon. This issue was discussed at the political science program meeting in October, and the Curriculum and Assessment Committee was asked to study the options and make recommendations. We anticipate that we will be submitting curriculum change proposals for at least some, and perhaps all, of the options—and almost certainly for the Environmental Politics option.

Metric: The number of students enrolling in one of the major’s options.

Overall Curriculum Metric: The number of political science majors. This is an indication of our success at offering a rich and relevant curriculum.

### III. Program Leadership

*Leadership Goal: To maintain strong leadership of the program.*

Recommendation 8: To have program leadership that is in residence full time.

The report does not indicate the evidentiary basis for this recommendation, so it is unclear what problem it is intended to address. The Program Coordinator does not supervise staff or faculty, nor does the person in this position make programmatic decisions without consultation with the School Director and/or Political Science Faculty. The School Director and the Director's Assistant are on campus five days a week during business hours, available to resolve emergencies as necessary. The Program Coordinator is available by phone and email during business hours, and is present on campus one to four days a week, as needed for planned meetings and consultations. We therefore reject this recommendation as unnecessary.

Recommendation 9: To reach out to alumni, including forming an advisory board or Friends of the Program.

**Objective 8: To obtain input from alumni both about their experiences as political science majors at Oregon State, and about possible curricular changes to the major.**

The review team recommends the creation of an advisory board for the program. But in our experience these are often expensive and labor-intensive to maintain. Instead, we plan to continue to seek input from alumni through other means. Last year we conducted a survey by mail of alumni. The response rate was very good, and we obtained much valuable information that has influenced our curricular changes, such as dropping the internship. We will continue to do similar surveys periodically, as well as seeking alumni input through less formal means, such as the use of social media.

Metric: The response rate of alumni surveys and the number of communications received from alumni through other means (including social media, emails, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

It is our hope and expectation that following this plan of action will improve the political science major and increase both enrollment in our classes and the number of political science majors.

Again, we wish to thank the review team for all of its efforts. Our program will benefit from carrying out these actions, as responses to the team's recommendations. If the team, or any member of it, wishes to discuss this plan, we are more than happy to do so.