



**To:** Jessica Stern, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
**From:** Rob Robinson, Coordinator, Political Science  
**Subject:** Response to Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the Political Science Program

We thank the Dean for her response and evaluation of our 2023-2024 Program Performance Review. In what follows, we provide our response to her specific recommendations (or opportunities for development). Our responses are presented in the same order as the Dean's own summary and evaluation. As requested, we also summarize any changes we consider in response to specific recommendations.

1. On DEI: *"The Dean's Office concurs with the ERT in their assessment that POSC does not seem to have coalesced around concrete strategies that are sufficient to address DEI issues. While new hires can contribute needed descriptive and substantive representation (see below), the Dean's Office believe this is a responsibility best shared by all faculty... We also urge the department to incorporate greater DEI content and strategies throughout the curriculum, rather than limiting it to a handful of courses or simply changing course catalog descriptions."*

The Department recognizes the importance of being more concretely invested in supporting inclusiveness for all groups, in our efforts to diversify our faculty through new hires, in our attentiveness to the importance of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference in our course materials and instruction, and in the climate we create for all faculty, staff and students involved in our political science program. These are important goals, and we believe we are working sincerely and productively toward improvement in these areas. However, in this, as in many areas, there is more we can and should be doing. We agree with the statement that the goals of DEI are responsibilities "shared by all faculty." The challenge lies in meaningfully operationalizing this aim without counterproductive micromanagement or intrusion into academic freedom. Our plans include the following:

- Our previous PPR goal. We will maintain our originally stated goal of hiring from diverse faculty pools, making clear in the catalog that the scope of POSC 100 must include attention to issues of race and ethnicity in American politics, and adding a class on Race and Ethnicity in American Politics into our core curriculum.
- Catalog Changes. Catalog changes, we submit, are substantively important because they highlight to both students and faculty alike class content (but not necessarily the approach or focus). Updating our catalog descriptions (in some cases to match what we already do in our courses) is an important step, because faculty are expected to teach the content the catalog includes.
- Bylaws. POSC will draft new bylaws in 2024-2025 once PAJ has finished its update. We agree that this provides an opportunity to help "craft... a common department vision" that speaks to

promoting equality and inclusion. We also agree with the Dean that our DEI committee will be a useful resource in helping write the relevant portion of these bylaws.

- Developing department DEI resources. Offering resources for integrating DEI concerns into our curriculum remains a department goal, particularly for classes with multiple sections. The DEI committee intends to work with the department to develop such resources.

Finally, we submit that most of our classes already include meaningful content and discussion about DEI issue that are authentically woven into course content. We wish to avoid strategies such as faculty marginalizing DEI content into “diversity weeks” on class syllabi, as they do not reflect the level of inclusion we seek for our students and faculty. Different courses have different needs (consider a class on methods versus one on media or policy) which require different strategies and expertise. That said, we remain open to discussing additional ways to enhance DEI in our pedagogy.

2. On curricular design: *“The ERT and Dean's Office urge the department to consider adding more scaffolding and sequencing of courses to the major, believing that the B.A would be more robust if there were more sequencing of courses (with some courses being prerequisites for higher-level ones). We do understand that this would cut against some students' needs for maximum flexibility, but we contend that adding curricular scaffolding/ sequencing will benefit students' progression through the major.”*

Department faculty discussed this after receiving the Dean’s evaluation. Our concerns and plans are as follows:

- Our primary concern about scaffolding remains unchanged: our students lead busy lives and providing them adequate flexibility is an important goal. Moreover, we do not always have adequate staffing to provide enough sections of potential prerequisites to ensure students make timely progress towards graduation, also a critical CSU system-wide goal.
  - A secondary concern is that some upper-division electives – such as classes on civil liberties, elections, the presidency, or political theory—attract students from outside our major. Adding prerequisites to these courses would deflate enrollment and reduce the valuable perspectives of students from different majors. It also reduces the chance that non-majors who take our courses might adopt a minor or change majors.
  - That said, there is some interest for reestablishing prerequisites for specific 400-level courses where that faculty member feels the skills and knowledge gained in a prior course is necessary for students to succeed. We will continue to discuss possible changes over the upcoming academic year.
3. On lecturer involvement: *“The ERT reports that lecturers feel isolated and would like to participate more in the life of the department. They also found that lecturers had a desire to have their contributions be better recognized. One suggestion to help reduce the feeling of isolation would be to locate lecturer offices on the same floor as TT faculty, which would serve to foster more community. The Dean's Office recommends POSC leadership invite lecturers to department meetings, encourage their participation in department and division events, and include them in various scholarship recognition activities organized by the department,*

*division, college, and university. Finally, the Dean's Office suggests POSC leadership conduct a survey of lecturers to gather information on, more specifically, how they would like to be included."*

We believe that the ERT and this response present a more negative picture of lecturer involvement than did lecturers themselves. One of the three faculty who met with the ERT stated, after reading the Dean's summary, that "while we did make concrete suggestions, and it might be useful to have an adjunct meeting, the tone of the reports is much harsher than what I experienced in the interview and in practice in my work life."

We note the following:

- *"One suggestion ... would be to locate lecturer offices on the same floor as TT faculty."* The Division has allocated and will continue to allocate office spaces to lecturers on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of Gordon Hall as they become available. However, with 35 fairly small offices on that floor, and almost that many tenure-track faculty from PAJ, there are very few office spaces on that floor to allocate to our adjunct faculty.
- *"The Dean's Office recommends POSC leadership invite lecturers to department meetings."* Lecturers are already invited to all department meetings, and have been for years. Attendance is light, though lecturers do participate when an agenda item is of direct interest or consequence to them.
- *"...encourage their participation in department and division events..."* Again, this is a regular occurrence. Lecturer faculty played key roles in high-level department events such as the Royce Symposium, our annual Town Hall meeting project, and our Congress to Campus event. Lecturers also regularly help with HIPS. As we also note below in section 4, any hesitancy about lecturer involvement comes from the fact that the university **does not compensate** lecturers for extra work, as contrasted with full-time faculty.

Having said this, the department agrees that we can do better in supporting our lecturer faculty. Some plans for the future include:

- Increasing Departmental Recognition. We do sometimes give lecturers recognition when they publish, receive funds or awards, or undertake other actions worthy of praise, but not necessarily in a systematic or sufficiently thorough manner. Regular and institutionalized recognition of such achievements is a good goal.
  - Lecturer Survey. We also agree with the Dean that a survey of lecturers on department culture and inclusion is a worthwhile task, and agree to undertake one in the coming academic year.
  - Annual Lecturer Meeting. Finally, the idea of a regular meeting only for lecturers is a good one—though past attempts at such events have suffered from light attendance—and is something we will consider how to implement.
4. On HIPS and succession planning: *Faculty burnout is palpable among those who lead [HIPS]. These programs would benefit by more institutionalization, so they do not rely on a limited number of dedicated faculty for their continuance. The Dean's Office is concerned that faculty retirement and burnout can kill some of the best programs. The Dean is eager to work with the department to develop a succession planning*

*strategy for these programs, and recommends that future job searches include interest in supporting these critical programs as essential qualifications.*

We appreciate this response and would gladly participate in strategic planning on succession plans.

We have already implemented the recommendation of placing support for HIPS in our job searches. For example, Dr. Acacio, our new hire for the 2024 academic year, has already begun working with Dr. Fox, one of our longstanding lecturers, to resurrect Model UN (we're aiming for a relaunch in Spring 2026).

To return to a point from section 3 – burnout can be ameliorated by greater use of our part-time faculty, many of whom have skills sets well suited to support HIPS and have the desire to do so. As just noted, Stacy Fox has both student and faculty experience with Model UN, and can support the program by either rotating into teaching the relevant course or serving as a club advisor. Dan Cook has proved to be a useful resource for Dr. Fiber for Moot Court, while Karalee Darnell has provided excellent support to Dr. Spitzer on the administration of our Town Hall meeting.

The problem, as we also note above, is compensation. Having part-time faculty – even those eager to help – do unpaid work strikes many faculty as unethical and raising unintended long-term consequences. We would like to work with the Dean's office to consider creative ways to provide for compensation for part-timers on HIPS.

5. On community engagement: *“The Dean's Office would like to see the department engage more with the local community. This could come in the form of more engagement in community-wide conversations during election seasons. The department already has a well-established emphasis on public institutions and public policy. The Dean's Office does recognize faculty reluctance of engaging with the public in our divisive times, but is committed to setting a tone that normalizes constructive disagreements.*

While we acknowledge room for improvement, we strongly reject the suggestion that we are uninvolved in the community or that fear of negative reactions prevents us from engaging.

- For this semester alone, POSC faculty have scheduled four confirmed election events with four more in various stages of development.
- Professor Castro was recently awarded a \$112,000 Scott-Jewett Grant to work with students on public interest law projects that will improve the quality of justice in underserved communities.
- The Royce Symposium remains an excellent venue for connecting faculty, alumni, and policymakers.
- Our annual Town Hall Meeting regularly involves around 30 different local elected and non-elected government leaders, as well as non-profit and advocacy group leaders.
- Our DC and OC internship programs connects our students and faculty with government and community leadership as well.

- Faculty in our department are also advisors to student groups that regularly work in the community: the College Democrats, the College Progressives, Pi Sigma Alpha, and PSSA.
- Finally, faculty are clearly willing to participate in community events, even potentially divisive ones, as seen by Dr. Spitzer's participation in a forum on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict last spring, or the program's event on Critical Race Theory in 2021, when that issue was a live-wire in public discourse.

The primary obstacle to further community engagement, at least in terms of engagement on the CSUF campus, is not concern over divisiveness but a host of bureaucratic hurdles faculty must jump through in order to organize them. From sometimes lackluster support by the Alumni Office or Student Affairs, to a dearth of affordable and appropriate venues, to opaque or arcane software platforms, to numerous restrictions on funds, to the number of university actors one must contact in order to bring an event to fruition, department faculty feel the university effectively, if unintentionally, **disincentivizes** engagement with the community.

We greatly appreciate the hire of a new staff member for PAJ, who we hope will specialize in handling these tasks and make holding events more viable for faculty, who can focus on the aspects of community events better suited to their expertise (such as design or invitation of experts). Alumni relations has new leadership and, hopefully, stronger support from the CSU system, both of which we see as positive developments. We also recognize that almost all the concerns we list above are outside the control of HHS and will not be helped by impending CSU budget cuts.

That said, we must state clearly that faculty burnout, either here or on HIPS, is driven in large part by **obstacles the university creates**. If university and college leadership desire greater engagement between faculty and the community, we ask they consider how to simplify and improve these processes.

6. On MAPS: *"The Dean's Office agrees with the Self Study's suggestion that the program should schedule a retreat focused specifically on the fate of the MA program... Considering the impact that sunseting the MA program might have on the lecturer pool should also be considered."*

We will hold our MAPS retreat in Fall 2024. The current position of the faculty is to keep the program, and work on ways to improve recruitment or implement other changes (such as adopting a 4+1 model) that might increase enrollment.

The immediate impact of sunseting the program on existing lecturers would be light, as our MAPS program is almost exclusively taught by full-time faculty (when we are fully staffed).

In the medium to long run, closing the program would negatively impact our ability to attract high-quality lecturer faculty, as a good percentage of current and past lecturers received an MA from our program. Closing the program would also reduce the number of graduate assistants we could offer faculty teaching K2s, in a time where we already go to AMST and HIST to meet our needs. All this said: the primary focus of the program cannot be to provide labor for our own needs.

We again thank the Dean for her feedback and all her support to date, and hope we can meet with her, or her office as needed over this academic year to help bring these recommendations and plans into fruition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Robinson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Robinson

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Coordinator, Political Science Program  
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