

To: Su Swarat, Assistant Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness

From: Jessica Stern, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Subject: Dean's Summary and Evaluation of the Political Science program

The Department of Political Science (POSC), situated in the Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice (PAJ), has roughly 370 majors, a MA program, and serves the campus' larger mission by teaching many general education courses. The program serves an average of 3507 students per year. POSC also serves the undergraduate curriculum broadly through core university-required courses such as Political Science 100: American Government. The department has a long standing and broad embrace of High Impact Practices (HIPs) including Moot Court, the Town Hall Meeting, the Cal State DC program, internships, and Transfer Student Learning Communities for both first-year students and transfer students. While these programs serve mostly PAJ majors (Political Science, Public Administration, and Criminal Justice), they are open to and serve many underrepresented populations on campus. The department has had considerable success in fundraising for scholarships, scholarship endowments, and support for their HIPS. This success is due in large part to its strong and generous alumni base.

The undergraduate major consists of a small number of required courses, a breadth requirement, and a series of electives that can be taken in any order. POSC has adopted a cohort model that has been successful in building community. Our analysis of retention rates for first-year students who have participated in cohort section reveals the increasing success of this model. While in the 2020 cohort, students who participated were not more likely to be retained, the numbers for the second and third cohorts show a significant increase in retention rates compared to students who did not join the cohort. Of the Fall 2022 entering POSC class, 88.9% of the students who were part of the cohort were retained into Fall 2023, compared to 75.9% of the POSC students who did not enroll in the cohort. The transfer cohort sections are showing promising results as well, and we encourage the department to study its effectiveness.

Undergraduate enrollment is stable. Since the last PPR in 2016-2017, the 4-year BA graduation rate has more than doubled and the equity gap has reduced substantially. Four-year graduation rates for first-time students are 50-65% and the six-year graduation rates is 75%. Transfer graduation rates are 55% (2-year) and 82% (4-year). In 2022-2023, 114 BA degrees and 7 MA degrees were awarded. The low number of MA degrees conferred place the MA

program on the edge of viability.

The department has 10 tenured or tenure-track faculty members, including a program coordinator. Two of these faculty also hold appointments in Public Administration. PAJ has recently hired a long-needed staff member to work on social media and event planning to support the division's many HIPs. The college's new tandem advisor model for undergraduate students, using a permanent professional advisor, is succeeding well in the division. Overall, the Department of Political Science is doing a lot of great work because of their outstanding faculty, especially given the resources that they have at their disposal.

On February 14, 2024, the Political Science program was reviewed by two external reviewers (Amy Cabrera Rasmussen, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, California State University Long Beach; Paul D'Anieri, Professor, Department of Political Science and School of Public Policy, University of California Riverside) and one internal reviewer (Elaine Lewinnek, Professor, Department of American Studies and Program Chair, Environmental Studies). On April 15, 2024, Dean Jessica Stern, Associate Dean Carl Wendt, coordinator Rob Robinson, and PAJ Chair Philip Kopp met to discuss POSC's Self Study, the External Review Team (ERT) report, and the Department's response to that report. In the remainder of this memo, we record and build on that discussion about the department's short- and long-term priorities.

Opportunities for Development

DEI:

For years, POSC has struggled with issues surrounding department climate and gender inequality. Since its last PPR (2016-2017), some faculty report improved climate, while others claim climate issues persist. Gender inequities exist in workload and equal participation in department leadership. A lack of voice in departmental governance was mentioned to the ERT as a persistence problem. We are pleased with some strides that the Division, under the guidance of the new Chair, Dr. Phillip Kopp, has made in the last semester in increasing the transparency in search committee elections and empowering people who did not feel that they had a place in the department leadership structure.

From their self-study, department leadership has proposed a few ways to address DEI issues that include, 1) hiring in subfields that are more likely to have diverse candidates, 2) changing the course description, requirements, and texts (to more inclusive texts) for Political Science 100, and 3) adding a class on Race and Ethnicity in American Politics to the core of the BA program. Program leadership has suggested creating a database of scholarly works that can be used by faculty to incorporate into their POSC 100 courses.

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. Crafting a common department mission, values, and modes of interaction is one good way to start. 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. Finally, we strongly support strengthening the role of the newly created POSC DEI committee, and encourage the department to work with this committee to

revise the department by-laws.

Hiring:

The Dean's Office recommends that POSC develop a long-term hiring plan that is geared towards increasing focus on US diversity (and more international coverage). We recognize the department's current value-neutral social science approach that deemphasizes positions of advocacy and a strong emphasis on social justice. We applaud the department for considering a 2025-2026 hire in the area of cross-national politics. This coincides with the results of a recent student survey that showed public law was the most requested area of curricular growth, and second comparative politics.

Curricular Planning: scaffolding/sequencing vs. flexibility:

The Self Study reports that POSC agrees that curricular flexibility is more important for student success than imposing a lot of structure. The ERT and Dean's Office urge the department to consider adding more scaffolding and sequencing of courses to the major, believing that the BA 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.

Lecturer Involvement in the Department:

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.

HIPS:

While POSC has developed and run multiple successful HIPS, there remain areas that these programs can be improved, such as providing greater visibility, more robust staff support, and clearer succession plans. Improvements in these areas will have large impacts because we know these programs support student success, and they could also impact student recruitment and retention (attract more majors and minors), and build connections with alumni who have gone on to excel in many impactful careers post-graduation. Reviving and expanding HIPS such as Model UN will also provide greater coverage of international and comparative politics in the curriculum. Expanding student involvement in the annual Royce symposium and in the three internship programs on law, politics, and administration will expand these areas as well.

Faculty burnout is palpable among those who lead these programs. 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.

The ERT notes that POSC should consider making participation in a HIP a requirement of all majors. The department disagrees, and the Dean's Office agrees with the department. Not all students have the ability to participate in HIPs due to the heavy time commitments and costs that is required with these programs. Making participation in a HIP a requirement would be detrimental to many POSC students. We agree with the program leadership's suggestion that the department track how many majors participate in these programs and then use these data to guide decisions on possible future expansions.

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.

Curricular Focus:

The ERT notes that POSC curriculum is heavily focused on the US, lacking sufficient breadth on the world outside the United States. The ERT argues that the department should broaden their curricular focus beyond the US, and they should increase their attention to diversity within the United States. While the department plans to develop a course on race and ethnicity in American politics (see above), a more holistic approach to this issue would include embedding ideas about diversity and equity in every course, a position that the Dean's Office strongly supports.

The MA Program:

The ETR notes that POSC needs to assess whether the MA program serves student needs. Program leadership, the ETR, and the Dean's Office all wonder if the program would be better off abandoning the MA degree altogether, so it can better focus on the department's core undergraduate mission. However, faculty seem to enjoy teaching the graduate courses and the MA appears to be a major part of the department's identity. 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. After all, the low number of MA degrees conferred places the MA program on the edge of viability. Considering the impact that sunseting the MA program might have on the lecturer pool should also be considered.

Growth:

There are a number of areas that the department should invest in in order to grow their majors. Marketing and communication (including website development) should be an area of focus. The program should work with campus partners (IT, Strat Comm, etc.) to update and improve the website, and to develop other ways to communicate with students and the community. A new staff person will be joining PAJ to assist in these efforts, especially by focusing on work that supports faculty and students involved in HIPs, including logistical support, event-planning, communications, and publicity. All this will maintain and expand equitable access and participation by students seeking such experiences.

We thank the department faculty and the external review team for their time and effort conducting these assessments and for putting these documents together. We look forward to working with the department and Academic Affairs on the areas of development.