External Review Report

CSUF College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Division of Politics, Administration, and Justice:

Political Science BA and MA; Public Administration BA Programs

External Site Visit Team (SVT)

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Overview

The Division of Politics, Administration and Justice consists of three undergraduate and two graduate programs (with a third under development) and six minors; this PPR only reviews the Political Science BA and MA, and the Public Administration BA. This report is based on the Division's Spring 2017 Self Study with Appendices, as well as a site visit conducted on February 17, 2017 that included interviews with the College Dean and Associate Dean, the Division Chair and Vice Chair, faculty teaching in the Political Science BA and MA programs and the Public Administration BA, and undergraduate majors and graduate students.

The Political Science Long Term Plan

The Self Study Report notes the following goals: "to improve the structure of the curriculum and co-curricular activities to maximize student success; to better evaluate the results of our teaching; to enhance opportunities for faculty research that will feed back into the classroom; to advise our students to graduate in a timely fashion; and to continue to serve as a key entry point for the University into the public affairs of the community." This External Review Report addresses these objectives.

High Impact Practices (HIP's)

The committee was very impressed by the Political Science program's commitment to providing not only their majors, but students throughout Cal State Fullerton, with opportunities to participate in the eight High-Impact Practices Programs and Courses they have developed. As the University has acknowledged in its Strategic Plan, providing small groups of students with hands-on activities under the direct supervision of faculty members increases the odds that students will graduate in a timely fashion and succeed after graduation. The students with whom we had lunch spoke with enthusiasm about their experiences in the Cal State DC program, which the Political Science program developed eleven years ago. The students worked with other interns, whom they described as being from prestigious colleges, and they brimmed with pride about being given the same education experience as those other students. The DC program does not serve only Political Science students and professors; professors from ten other disciplines have participated in it.

Another HIP that serves CSUF as a whole is The Town Hall Meeting, which is integrated into some POSC 100 courses which services GE students. It turns what could be a very large, amorphous class into small learning communities that are tasked with completing serious research and writing projects on specific public policies. The project culminates in a Town Hall meeting, which trains students to communicate orally and connects them with local leaders. The Town Hall Meeting is a shining star in the CSUF GE curriculum; it meets **all five** of the GE Student Learning Goals adopted by CSUF. Space alone prevents us from writing just as enthusiastically about the Mock Trial program and all of the other HIP's. However, the SVT commends the Political Science program faculty for the outstanding work they are doing and we recommend that the pedagogies utilized receive more support from the College and University as these are the types of experiences that energize student learning in the present, and foster enthusiasm in alumni.

We do fear that the HIP's face some threats. As more and more programs at CSUF have followed the Strategic Plan's call to develop HIP's, funding sources that the Political Science faculty used to be able to depend on (Institutionally Related Activities Funds and Miscellaneous Course Fees, for example) have become less dependable. This pushes many faculty members into the role of fundraisers, and this is a job that faculty are not trained to do. Fundraising can take much more time than a course-prep usually takes (many of these HIP's are integrated into courses), and if you combine that with the paperwork, planning, and extra time needed to mentor students that is demanded by these activities, faculty are well over the average work load expectation for a 3 unit course. We have two suggestions: 1) Faculty members who teach HIP's should draft a proposal for an additional staff member, or two, who would take over the logistical planning and the fundraising for all Political Science HIP's. We anticipate that this proposal would only find an ear in the College and University if it is very detailed and persuasive. Another option, providing additional staff support for fundraising at the College level, if focused specifically on HIPs, could benefit the Division as well as other programs. 2) If hiring another staff member is impossible, we suggest that the Division consider giving HIP faculty assigned-time credit if they are at a point with their HIP that requires more time than a typical course prep does. The criteria for getting assigned time would need to be very clear so that this reassigned time does not arouse suspicion or resentment amongst non-HIP faculty. We also agree with the faculty member who suggested that the HIP's become institutionalized so that if the individual who created the program goes on leave another individual can take it over; therefore we suggest that professors who receive assigned time should be tasked with developing the documentation that would allow another professor to implement the HIP, if need be.

Climate and Community

The Political Science and Public Administration programs are organized in a Division with the Criminal Justice program. The Self Study Report notes, "Since the last PPR, a number of senior faculty either completed or started their retirements or left the university. The department has made new hires to either replace them or shift resources to underserved areas…We thus anticipate that the bulk of our faculty will remain in the department for some time." As sometimes happens during a period of change, the climate has become one of "division" and separation among the program faculties (the words used to describe this, across various interviews throughout the day, included "cliques," "people don't speak to each other," "bullying," "growing pains," "partisan"). The flashpoint for the current unease appears to be the RTP process, and the unease seems to have been repeated over the past few cycles of review. The SVT was told that the Division's RTP standards are under revision, and interviews with Assistant and Associate professors indicates that some of these faculty are less active in the Division than they might otherwise be; some others – among these are the most recently hired faculty – are unaware of the nature of the unease. However, in a Division that hosts both liberal arts and applied and professional programs, the periodic refreshing of organizational procedures that reflects an emergent culture is necessary (RTP isn't the source of the unease; RTP simply provided a light indicating change was occurring in ways that require the attention). This type of unease, however, can have consequences in terms of community sustainability, and impacts all of the program's long-range objectives. The resilience of the faculty is being tested and given the broad range of contributions that individual faculty are making in the classroom, in their scholarship, and in their service, reconceptualizing "community" in light of these seems like an obvious recommendation (but in practice, a very challenging one). Therefore, we recommend that an outside facilitator/mediator provide awareness training and team building training to assist the faculty in identifying the sources of unease and acknowledging these so that re-establishing "community" (learning to live together) and the revision of the RTP document are informed by a spirit of

reconciliation, union, and mutual understanding among the Division faculty. In addition, the Division may wish to examine its governance structure and look for new pathways for faculty participation.

Governance and Rank and Tenure Processes

Given the dynamic nature of the governance and RTP processes, any discussion of change should be placed in the context of the human relationships (the Division as community). This requires the involvement of all Division stakeholders. If good governance – RTP is one element of governance in the Division – consists of transparency, public discussion, public participation, and criticism, then the ways information is acquired matter as much as changing a document or the governance structure. Effective collaborative problem solving requires substantive, procedural, and psychological satisfaction by all stakeholders, and a facilitator can work with the Division to organize this so that, for example, it addresses the long term planning objectives as equally important to success and valuable to the future of the different degree program faculty. We also note that there is no apparent requirement or need for RTP standards to be the same in the liberal arts and professional programs. Consideration of discipline-specific RTP standards might be wise.

Enrollment Issues in Political Science BA and MA program

The Political Science program serves the Division, College, and the University by teaching the state-mandated American Institutions US constitution and state and local government requirement, POSC 100, and the Division should consider offering additional sections and expanding the number of sections using, or linked to, HIPs if support is available. This accomplishes two objectives. First, it addresses critical CSUF strategic objectives (Goals 1 and 2 of the University Strategic Plan). Second, as a GE course POSC 100 introduces students to the Political Science program and can be a source of new majors; it is also the site of competition. Although the program is beginning to pilot online sections of POSC 100, classes not taught by experts in American politics must be avoided in this important course. Classroom access support from the Dean's office is important to this effort.

The BA and MA in Political Science have both suffered from modest drops in enrollment. The drops are small enough that we do not feel the department needs to be overly concerned about it (in the BA, the decrease in Political Science is almost the same as the increase in Public Administration). To the degree they need to fill classes, the faculty have a variety of options on the table.

At the BA level, the options on the table include designing ways to entice new majors at the freshman/sophomore level, increasing fill rates at the junior/senior level by realigning courses in the breadth requirement, requiring additional 400-level courses, creating a senior capstone, or adding options or concentrations. The most efficient solution to deal with the under-enrollment at the 400 level may be through a combination of course renumbering/renaming, and requiring an additional 400 level course. To combat the students' tendencies to fill their schedules based on course times rather than intentional building of a course of study, offering concentration paths perhaps through the scheduling of classes may help students tie their classes together. Offering concentrations requires considerably less work than requiring a Capstone class, which could entail faculty developing new courses and stepping out of their current courses on a regular basis—which could be difficult given the number of administrative reassigned times in the department. An alternative might be to identify a specific 400 level course within each of the identified fields and designating it as a capstone course and establishing a common capstone

assignment, or menu of assignments for faculty to choose among (this would have the added benefit of offering a mechanism for assessment). Offering a concentration in Public Policy might be an intermediate step to start preparing for a Public Policy BA. We encourage a broad based conversation around adding a new degree so that all fields can participate in and benefit from any change.

The Political Science MA is valuable to Division because it is a strong liberal arts degree and the Political Science faculty are committed to increasing enrollment numbers. We encourage the MA program faculty to do systematic research on what the market for the Political Science MA degree looks like, and what a marketable MA degree curriculum looks like, to determine what steps should be taken next. Perhaps developing an external advisory board might facilitate the thinking about the MA degree.

Classroom Access

We want to note the Self Study's argument that classroom access could be negatively impacting their enrollment, despite the Division's best efforts to schedule to meet demand. The Self Study Report notes that purposive scheduling is used to rotate classes in across day and night blocks from semester to semester. Still, there is a challenge in scheduling classes so that GE students can take courses at their preferred time and that majors can pick up three or four classes within a reasonable time frame while on campus, and it isn't clear from the student survey whether this is occurring, or not. An issue complicating any analysis is the use of some 300 level classes in different GE Pathways (although the Self Study indicates a drop in 300 level general education enrollment). Although we cannot say definitely that more access to classrooms would necessarily increase enrollments, it is clear to us that a lot of the Division's human resources are being invested in scrambling to find rooms for their classes. We were heartened to hear, both in the Self Study and during our meeting with Dr. Fontaine and Dr. Sargeant, that the Dean's Office is aware of this problem and are working to fix it. We strongly encourage that these efforts continue to have the top priority.

Assessment

The Division should be commended on its efforts to design ambitious, disciplinary appropriate learning outcomes for its programs. It should also be commended for putting forward a good faith effort to assess those learning outcomes. The external review team was able to see the assessment reports for the Political Science BA, MA, and the Public Administration BA. The assessments have been completed through focus groups and evaluations of selected class writing assignments. As would be expected in any student population, some students did better than others, some goals were met, and some department goals need additional work. Members of the department were appropriately willing to revisit the assessment reports and learn from them, and some expressed an interest in "closing the loop" to improve areas of weakness. A first step might include revisiting the relationship between the SLOs and the curriculum by mapping the curriculum. Such an exercise provides two benefits: it reminds faculty of where the courses they teach fit into the larger enterprise, and can provide an impetus for rethinking course names and perhaps even scheduling course sequences for intellectual development *and* timing purposes.

The SVT would like to encourage the program to continue to consider applying sophisticated research design principles to their assessment process. In particular, we encourage the Division to consider the possibility that there will always be a distribution of outcomes—some students will achieve at a high level, others at a low level. How can you recruit students into your assessment procedures that are

representative of that range, and measure learning outcomes in ways that are comparable over time? Focus groups eliminate the need to produce assessable class assignments, but they are not as reliable as paper-based assessments and it is unlikely that very small focus groups are as representative as other forms of assessment could be. As noted above, requiring a Capstone course with a required assignment or menu of assignments would provide an easy location for assessment at the end of a major's career. Alternatively, the Division could assess seniors in each major by requiring a non-credit bearing survey or exam in order to graduate, or by requiring faculty in 400-level courses to administer an assessment instrument or assign an assessable product.

We did feel that instead of growing organically, the Division's assessment plan was developed to comply with the University's increasing assessment demands. While none of the faculty members were hostile to assessment, we found few faculty members who expressed enthusiasm about how assessment would enrich their pedagogy. This suggests to us that the Division may want to consider taking all of the important lessons that they have learned in the past few years about how to conceive of and institute an assessment plan and revise theirs as a Division so that people can create an assessment apparatus that not only allows them to comply with University assessment demands but helps enrich their teaching and student learning.

Another aspect of assessment related to enriching teaching and learning is the role of advisement. Since surveys show that majors are not aware of advisement services and therefore aren't making use of them, perhaps an alternative would be to develop a basic advisement "cheat-sheet" for freshmen/sophomores and another one for juniors/seniors. This short list of things to do can be read in each class on census day by the faculty member teaching the class (and posted on the class electronic bulletin board page at the beginning of each term). The hours of the program's advisement service should be posted on this "cheat-sheet," and perhaps the location and hours of the program's advisement services can be put on each course syllabus as well if this isn't occurring already. Given the online lives of many students, developing a social media presence (promoted by faculty) is another sensible way to encourage students to make use of advising resources. Encouraging a discussion about the program's curriculum can build a culture of awareness in the program's majors (and non-majors taking courses, who may see some benefits from being in a program that is so student-focused).

Summary

The Political Science Department is to be commended for completing such an honest, probing Self Study. The faculty members' dedication to their major and minor students, as well as their GE students, is truly commendable. We have offered, here, some preliminary suggestions to the questions they posed in their Self Study about BA and MA enrollment issues, curriculum development, and assessment. Ultimately we believe that the Division must first renew their sense of community with the help of a qualified facilitator/mediator. We anticipate that unless faculty members within the Division establish a new spirit of camaraderie they will be unable to begin working on the myriad of improvement actions discussed in this report.