Review of the M.A., M.S. in Political Science
45.1001

**Context and overview.** The M.A., M.S. in Political Science program is housed in the Department of Politics and Government within the College of Arts and Sciences. The department also offers a B.A., B.S. in Political Science, a B.A., B.S. in Legal Studies (new in fall 2014), and minors in legal studies and political science. The department hosts two interdisciplinary minors (Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies, and Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies) and provides a leadership role in the American Democracy Project on campus. The M.A., M.S. in Political Science program is designed to prepare students for advanced positions with state and local government, domestic and international non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and community development agencies. The program is also designed to prepare students for doctoral study in political science and allied disciplines.

**Self-study process.** Self-study has been an ongoing process in the Department of Politics and Government since the 2006 program review. In 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2014 the department conducted assessments of both undergraduate and graduate programs involving student surveys and review of university-wide alumni survey results. Faculty conducted a systematic review of the curriculum from 2008 to 2011. In 2010, the assessment director in the department conducted position audits of the associate chairperson, graduate director, legal studies director, and internship coordinator positions. In 2012, the department held an assessment retreat, which resulted in faculty adoption of revised student learning outcomes. The department conducted a pilot assessment in 2013 using the new outcomes. Several evaluation and planning initiatives have been implemented in response to recommendations resulting from the 2006 program review. These include analysis of faculty recruitment and retention and adoption of enrollment targets. The 2014 program review self-study process was led by the assessment director. The director consulted with appropriate faculty and staff members to draft the self-study report, which was reviewed by faculty in summer and fall 2014 before its submission.

**Program curriculum.** Students enrolling in the M.A., M.S. in Political Science program may elect to pursue a sequence in applied community development, global politics and culture, or public service, or may complete the degree without electing a sequence. The applied community development sequence is unique in its collaborative administration by the Department of Politics and Government and the Adlai Stevenson II Center for Community and Economic Development on campus. Similar to graduate sequences in sociology and economics, the applied community development sequence is designed for returned Peace Corps volunteers, students with experience similar to the Peace Corps, and students preparing to enter the Peace Corps. Students select between a 39-credit hour plan of study (with a research capstone project) and a 35-credit hour plan of study (with a thesis). All students in the sequence complete an 11-month field experience during their second year in the program, either with a community or governmental organization or with the Peace Corps, to prepare them for work with non-profit community development organizations after graduation. Students selecting the public service sequence, the global politics and culture sequence, or no sequence complete at least 32 credit hours including either a thesis or comprehensive exam. All students in the program may apply up to nine credit hours of relevant graduate courses from other departments toward the degree.

**Program or unit faculty.** Since 2006 the Department of Politics and Government has hired 10 faculty members. By fall 2014 the department had 19 tenured or tenure track faculty members and 4 full-time and 14 part-time non-tenure track faculty members. All tenure track faculty members hold the terminal degree in their discipline (a Ph.D. in political science for all but the director of legal studies, who holds a J.D.). Non-tenure track faculty members are required to hold a master’s or law degree. Politics and Government faculty is among the most diverse at Illinois State. Thirty-five percent of full-time faculty members in the department are female, and 30 percent self-identify with racial/ethnic populations traditionally underrepresented at the University. Faculty members actively engage in scholarship and service to the discipline. Since the 2006 program review, department faculty has produced 43 authored or edited books, 100 articles or chapters, and 207 other creative works. Faculty members have served on journal editorial boards, served as consultants to national and international organizations, appeared before the United States Congress and Congressional committees, participated in program review for other political science programs nationally and internationally, and contributed expert opinion for numerous mainstream media outlets.

**Program goals and quality indices.** Department goals and, by extension, program goals are to offer comprehensive,
rigorous, and contemporary academic programs that attract, retain, and graduate highly qualified students; maintain a
diverse nationally- and internationally-recognized faculty engaged in the highest quality research and teaching; and
build strong ties with on-campus, local community, and broader off-campus constituencies. Through this program
review process, department faculty has initiated discussions regarding indicators faculty deems most relevant and
appropriate for assessing quality of its graduate political science program relative to benchmark and aspirational
programs. These discussions will continue.

**Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process.** Since the 2006 program review, the student learning
outcomes assessment plan for the M.A., M.S. in Political Science has been a work in progress. Program faculty has
devoted considerable time discussing, revising, and piloting elements of the plan. This work continues. Significant
changes made to the assessment plan and process since 2006 include abandonment of the pre-test/post-test model of
evaluating student learning and adoption of new student learning outcomes. Program faculty has since revised its
student survey and focus group questionnaires in light of the new learning goals and has begun mapping learning
outcomes to the curriculum. Incomplete elements of the assessment plan and process to be addressed in coming years
include regularly updating concept mapping of learning outcomes across courses, developing a database of
pedagogical strategies used by program faculty to apply the learning outcomes, and developing a database of
exemplary student work that reflects student achievement of learning outcomes.

**Specialized accreditation.** The discipline of political science does not have an accreditation or certification process
for graduate programs at this time.

**Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review.** The department has responded to
many recommendations resulting from the 2006 program review, with responses to some concerns completed and
some responses underway at this time. Of immediate concern to the Academic Planning Committee in 2006 were
assessment of student learning and recruitment and retention of faculty. As has been described above, faculty has
made significant progress revising the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, and this work
continues. An ad hoc committee formed by the department chairperson completed an examination of faculty
recruitment and retention in 2009. The committee recommended additional strategies for supporting pre-tenured
faculty in their progress toward tenure and promotion and for professional development across all faculty ranks. As
has been noted, identification of quality indicators and use of them to assess the quality of the program relative to peer
and benchmark programs at other institutions is planned.

**Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand.** At least three notable ongoing
shifts in social and political forces are likely to disproportionately affect students of political science in the coming
years: dramatic reduction in law school enrollment, decline in government employment nationwide, and
globalization. Traditionally, a significant percentage of students enrolled in political science programs intend to
matriculate to law school. Due to dramatically increased costs of attending law school and the declining number of
legal jobs paying enough to retire student loans, law school enrollment has declined 37 percent since 2010. This
phenomenon is expected to continue, with some positions previously filled by law school graduates instead filled
by paralegals. With the decline in government employment nationwide, the prospects of political science students
obtaining work in the field are more limited. To better position its graduates to compete for and advance in the
fewer available jobs, the graduate program in political science offers both a public service sequence and an applied
community development sequence. The former is designed for students interested in state or local government
employment, while the latter is designed especially for students interested in work with community and non-
governmental organizations and includes an 11-month field experience. Many political science programs
nationwide focus on nations and regions largely insulated from broader social transformations that shape the global
political environment. Through recent discussions among department faculty regarding new student learning
outcomes, awareness of and engagement with the cross-national interconnected dimensions of social and political
life is now a greater focus in department programs. Graduate students especially interested in global politics of the
modern world may enroll in the global politics and cultures sequence.

**Major findings of this program review self-study.** Faculty of the Department of Politics and Government is
generally satisfied with the structure and content of the M.A., M.S. in Political Science program. Program offerings
are diverse and manageable, and the program seems well positioned to assist students in meeting their career and
personal goals in a changing political environment. Despite significant faculty turnover and the reduction in the
number of faculty lines since the last program review, faculty has maintained the quality of the graduate program and
The program has continued to modify the program to remain current with changes in the discipline and the careers it supports. A particular source of pride among faculty is the strong record of student-faculty research collaboration and of co-authoring papers and presentations. Faculty has made significant progress in revising and strengthening its student learning outcomes assessment processes since the last program review. New student learning outcomes have been adopted, and mapping of those outcomes to the curriculum is underway. Faculty will work to complete and implement the assessment plan during the next three to four years. Faculty members in the department have been highly productive in scholarship, teaching, and service to the university and discipline. A concern shared among faculty is whether this productivity can be maintained when the number of full-time-equivalent faculty members remains at historic lows. Regarding faculty evaluation, it is not clear whether teaching assessment instruments used by the department accurately capture teaching quality. In addition, the current system of faculty evaluation may work well for junior faculty but might not meet faculty or department needs over time. Both faculty evaluation matters merit further review and analysis.

**Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle.** Based on findings of this program review self-study, faculty of the M.A., M.S. in Political Science program has identified the following priority initiatives: aggressively advocate for tenure track faculty lines and work to retain faculty the department hires; advocate for appropriate space to house faculty, students, and staff; consider changes to the instruments used to evaluate teaching quality; revisit faculty assignment and evaluation processes; complete and implement the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program; and review the status of projects identified in the department strategic plan to identify strategies yet to implemented and goals yet to be achieved.

**Review Outcome.** The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.A., M.S. in Political Science to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee commends program faculty for accommodating a variety of student interests by offering three sequences. For students interested in public sector employment or international politics, the department offers a public service sequence and a global politics and cultures sequence, both culminating in a thesis or comprehensive exam. For students interested in a career of service to communities through the non-profit sector, the program offers an applied community development sequence (ACD) in collaboration with the Adlai Stevenson II Center for Community and Economic Development. The ACD curriculum includes an 11-month field internship with a community agency for students with prior experience in the Peace Corps or some other community development context. Students entering the program without that experience receive a Peace Corps placement.

The committee recognizes the program for building and supporting a faculty that is diverse in expertise, specialization, and race/ethnicity/country of origin. The committee commends faculty members for their scholarly productivity, including more than 40 books authored or edited since the 2006 program review, and for their service to the discipline through their work on editorial boards, consultations with national and international organizations, and testimony before the United States Congress. The committee also recognizes the program for its collaborative work with Milner Library faculty in developing and maintaining resources and services that support both the curriculum and faculty research.

The Academic Planning Committee appreciates work done by faculty to refine the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, including adoption of new learning outcomes in 2012. The committee asks faculty to build on its efforts by completing and implementing a revised student learning outcomes assessment plan that incorporates curriculum maps, direct and indirect measures of student learning, rubrics, an implementation strategy, and a systematic process for reviewing assessment results and utilizing them to identify and implement program improvements. The committee asks the department to submit its revised assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by December 1, 2016. The committee further asks the program to implement its revised assessment plan during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years by collecting and analyzing data, utilizing findings to inform programmatic decisions, and documenting decisions made and the rationale for them. The committee asks the department to submit a report on its implementation to the Office of the Provost by December 1, 2019.

Numerous changes have occurred in the discipline, at the University, and in the department since faculty completed the program distinctiveness exercise in 2000. Accordingly, the committee asks the program to complete the analysis of aspirational institutions described in Section III.B of the “Guidelines for Academic Program Review for self-studies due to the Office of the Provost on October 1, 2014, Graduate Programs.” While there might not be other
As published in Academic Plan 2015-2020

programs in the state, region or nation identical to the program at Illinois State, the committee asks faculty to identify other graduate political science programs that excel with respect to one or more quality measures considered most pertinent and important to our own program. The committee asks faculty to identify specific actions our program can take to achieve levels of quality that approach, meet, or exceed quality levels of those aspirational programs. While increasing the number of tenure-line faculty members is one action that might be identified, the committee urges faculty to identify actions that can be undertaken through allocation or reallocation of resources already available to the program. The committee asks the department to submit its report to the Office of the Provost by May 1, 2016.

The Academic Planning Committee asks that these three follow-up reports exclusively address the M.A., M.S. in Political Science program. As with the process for conducting the self-study analysis and preparing the self-study report, all faculty members should be provided meaningful opportunities to participate in development of the follow-up reports.

**Recommendations.** The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2022, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- Identify and administer specific, varied, and disaggregated measures for assessing and improving the quality of teaching in the program.
- Develop and implement a plan to recruit for racial/ethnic diversity among students.
- Maintain gender and racial/ethnic diversity among faculty at or above national averages for the discipline.
- Develop and implement a plan for promoting timely student progress toward graduation; components of the plan should include, but not necessarily be limited to, methods for tracking time-to-degree; methods for proactively working with students near, at, or beyond the six-year time limit; and a plan for evaluating advisement services.
- Design and implement a systematic program of regular communication with program alumni to collect and maintain data on alumni perceptions of the program and on alumni successes in employment and advanced education.
- Develop and implement a plan to systematically track student involvement in research, including collaborative research with faculty members, and communication of research results through publications and presentations.
- In light of changes in departmental needs and in faculty professional development needs and desires, initiate faculty-wide conversations regarding tenure-line faculty assignments, tenure-line faculty evaluation processes and standards, and strategies for ongoing communication of processes and standards to tenure-line faculty.
- Continue to utilize data collected through program assessment to make program improvements and document how that has been addressed.
- Building on elements of the program review self-study and follow-up reports and incorporating recommendations in this program review outcome, compile a new strategic plan for the department, including actions to be taken to maintain and improve the quality of each academic program administered by the department.
### Comparative Data, M.A., M.S. in Political Science (45.1001)

#### Fall Enrollment

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