

SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY PLANNING

Academic Unit Review – Summary

Department: Political Science / International Relations Program

Site Visit	2-3 March 2009
Date of Report	April 2009
Informal Response to Planning	May 2009
Formal Response to Planning	September 2009
Implementation Update	Expected Winter 2011
Midterm Review	Expected Fall 2014

Summary of Departmental Self-Study

The Department of Political Science consists of five full-time faculty members, one of whom teaches only in the International Relations program. Faculty members in Political Science cover four sub-fields: comparative politics, political theory, Canadian politics, and international politics. The Department shares administrative resources and support staff with other units in Social Sciences. It offers Honours, Major, and Minor in Political Science programs. In 2007-08, the Department extensively revised its introductory course, POLS 1001, which serves as a prerequisite for all 2000-level courses and the IR program. The Department has established a regular rotation of courses at all levels and has developed an equitable distribution of teaching responsibilities. Members are active in research and in community service. The Honours and Major programs grapple with a tension between requiring exposure to each sub-field (as is currently required) and allowing greater depth in one or two areas. Graduates have gone on to graduate programs in Canada and abroad or have entered the public service. The Department collaborates with other departments and programs to fill out its program offerings, but notes that its plans to develop a thesis-based Honours and introduce a required course in methods would require an additional faculty member.

The International Relations program is currently independent of the Political Science Department, although its sole faculty member is a member of that Department. The program is overseen by a Director and an advisory committee, although the administrative structure is “complex and ill-defined” and the relationship between the IR program and the Political Science Department needs to be clarified. IR is multi-disciplinary, with a required core of courses in Political Science, Economics, History, Geography, Languages, and Culture, and allows students to achieve both a broad perspective on international issues as well as more detailed knowledge of one or two areas of sub-specialization. At the outset, IR offered Honours, Major and Minor programs, but in the early 2000s the Minor was

discontinued. The external review team is requested to review the current program and offer suggestions for improvement.

The Department recommends merging the Department of Political Science and the International Relations program into a single Department in order to clarify and coordinate the relationship between the two. A single Head would manage the budgets and responsibilities of both programs, although an independent IR Program Director would be maintained, as would an IR Advisory Board. A replacement position for Michael Tucker would teach in both IR and Political Science, as would Dave Thomas. An additional tenure-track position would undertake research and teaching in the area of law and politics.

Summary of External Reviewers' Report

Faculty members in Political Science are complimented for maintaining a Political Science program with four sub-fields and at the same time maintain active research programs. Since the self-study framed the main issue as that of integrating the IR program into the Political Science Department, the reviewers' principal recommendation deals with this: that this occur; that a multidisciplinary IR Council be appointed, chaired by the Head of Political Science; that the IR Council reexamine the IR curriculum in order to minimize redundancies and increase cross-listing of courses; that the IR Minor be restored; and that the new hire teach and research in the areas of international relations and comparative politics.

The enrolment numbers suggest that Political Science has been experiencing a crisis in enrolments. The reviewers estimated a 50% decline since 2001-2, a sharper fall off than elsewhere in the Faculty of Social Sciences. Since the reviewers were disappointed not to be able to meet with more students during their visit, a subsequent electronic survey was conducted, which, while emphasizing student satisfaction with the faculty members, small class sizes, and the range of topics covered, highlighted three areas of concern: a lack of opportunity to study topics in depth, the lack of a research methods course, and limited course choice.

Subsequent recommendations aimed to address the enrolment issue deal with the revamped first-year course, new courses, fourth-year course offerings, contact with other Departments and Programs, liaison with the Library and the Teaching Centre, and course listings in the calendar.

Summary of Departmental and Program Response

In general terms, the Department and Program were pleased with the reviewers' support for the direction that they outlined in their self study. While concerned about the declining FTEs in Political Science, they provide a number of corrections to the reviewers' interpretation of the data provided and offer a number of internal

and external reasons for this decline. IR numbers have remained strong by any measure. There is strong support for the integration of IR and POLS into a single Department while maintaining the interdisciplinary nature of the IR Program (by having the IR Council chaired by someone other than the Head of POLS). The IR Council will consist of approximately 4 people (IR Director, 1 member from POLS/IR, and 2 members from other Departments participating in the delivery of the program) and its first task will be to consider the specific recommendations regarding curriculum. The Department will develop a vision and mission statement for POLS. A possible name change for the unit is being actively considered. The Political Science Students Association has been revitalized.

Planning Committee and Provost Response

The Planning Committee and Provost were impressed by the quality of the self-study, external reviewers' report, and the formal response. There is a good sense that the units have engaged seriously with the issues and there is general support for the overall direction and actions that are planned. The Department is encouraged to think about a name change sooner rather than later.

The Department is authorized to search for a tenure-track position, at the rank of Assistant Professor, in the areas of international relations and comparative politics on the understanding that the individual will teach both POLS and IR courses.

Upon receipt of a written plan from the Department for the use of student assistants in POLS 1001, the Provost will provide on-going funding, as per Action 8 of the Academic Renewal Plan.