

May 4, 2016

To: David Eaton, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School  
Rebecca Aanerud, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Planning, Graduate School  
Jason Johnson, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Academic Affairs  
Patricia Moy, Associate Vice Provost for Academic and Student Affairs  
Judith Howard, Divisional Dean of Social Sciences, College of Arts & Sciences

Cc: Robert Stacey, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

From: George Lovell, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science

RE: Response to the Department of Political Science Program Review Report

On behalf of the Department of Political Science, I express my appreciation of the review committee's perceptive and constructive review of our department. We are grateful that a committee with four outstanding and experienced scholars responded thoughtfully to our self-study, raised or amplified some important issues, and provided us with a helpful set of recommendations. We were pleased to receive a report that recognizes the quality of our faculty and teaching programs and encourages us to continue emphasizing our distinct intellectual strengths. We also thank the committee for calling attention to some problems for us to work on. Also notable is the committee's realistic understanding of the structural resource constraints that limit our capacities. Our department has learned and grown as a result of this constructive review process.

The report concludes by noting that the committee's recommendations are mostly "minor or modest" and aimed at "fine tuning" a generally successful program. We find the specific suggestions in each section of the report very helpful, and we have no significant disagreements. The focus in this response is on a few important issues that merit some amplification and clarification because they relate to our future plans. I group the response under five general areas identified in the introductory section of the committee report: 1) faculty losses and hiring; 2) undergraduate enrollments and programmatic issues; 3) funding challenges in our graduate program; 4) grants and other potential revenue sources; and 5) department governance and climate issues.

### **1) Faculty Losses and Recruiting.**

The report notes the "hemorrhage" of faculty to outside institutions and retirements, and highlights in particular the effect of recent losses on the Race and Ethnicity Politics (REP) field and on extramural grant generation. The losses are the most significant development since our last review in 2005. We are now down to just 23 FTEs. Less than ten years ago we had 30, and we articulated a goal of 35 FTEs when we responded to our last external review. Obviously faculty losses hurt in myriad ways, and the departures to universities that offer higher salaries and greater research support have hit particularly hard.

Importantly, however, these significant losses should not overshadow some related developments that are more positive. It is particularly notable that we have now had eighteen successful reten-

tion cases since our last review. All of those cases ended with our faculty turning down significantly more lucrative offers to remain in our department. Although we cannot compete evenly on financial terms, we have done very well by maintaining strong department collegiality that builds loyalty. It is also worth reiterating that faculty hemorrhaging is the inevitable result of one of our proven strengths: We make outstanding hiring decisions on assistant professors and have effectively mentored many promising new PhD's into outstanding scholars with national reputations. While we would prefer not to be the farm team for the Ivy League, we have learned to appreciate our effectiveness in that role. It is also remarkable that we have maintained collegiality despite the very significant salary inequities that have been fed by retention cases.

It is also noteworthy that, since the site visit, we have successfully recruited our top target in the REP field: Professor Sophia Wallace of Rutgers University. We also had two successful retention cases involving REP scholars of color just this year. All three of these successes came against competing offers with significantly greater compensation. The successes reflect our colleagues' expectation that we have been and will remain a supportive department for scholars from underrepresented groups. The addition of Professor Wallace rounds out a revamped REP group that is far more intellectually cohesive and dynamically synergistic than in the past. We now have one of the strongest and most intellectually distinct REP groups in the political science discipline. We believe these recent gains position us well to add more scholars from underrepresented groups to our faculty in future searches, including searches in fields other than REP.

We welcome the committee's suggestion of hiring a senior scholar, although we do see some legal/logistical complications around the specific suggestion of hiring a female full professor. More generally, we see need and strong justification for additional growth in our faculty size. Due to tremendous administration support this year, we will add three new colleagues this Fall. Yet we still have not come close to catching up with recent faculty losses, and will still be carrying a relatively high student-to-FTE ratio. We also need to remain out front of some looming retirements. While aware that outside structural constraints will keep us smaller than peer programs for some time, we remain confident that we can make outstanding hires, and thus also optimistic about maintaining our distinctive intellectual identity and strong research profile.

## **2) Undergraduate Enrollments and Program Issues.**

We are happy that the committee recognized our undergraduate program as a longstanding strength of the department, and we are grateful for their observation that some recent declines in enrollments and majors have been scaled to downsizing of our faculty. The committee's suggestions regarding the undergraduate program are excellent, and many speak to issues that we have already identified as areas for reform. We think the problem of lack of structure in the major is a serious one and we are working to address it. We have some program reforms on the agenda for this year, and will continue a broader review of the program. Changes going forward will continue to be incremental, but that is a necessity given the limited flexibility that results from our small faculty size relative to student load.

We share the committee's expressed sense that we cannot greatly expand our numbers of majors or student enrollments without a commensurate increase in faculty numbers. However, we do see some room for making improvements on both fronts. In particular, we hope to recover some lost majors efficiently by courting more students as double majors. We are also working to make

our lower division courses more appealing to students in engineering, natural sciences, and humanities who choose elective courses in the social sciences.

One very big concern is the effect that impending TA cuts will have on undergraduate instruction, given the essential contributions our graduate students make to undergraduate instruction. We also share the committee's concern about the future of our Writing Center, given the lack of permanent funding. The center is an essential part of our ability to teach writing, perhaps the most valuable skill that our students learn in our program.

### **3) Graduate Program Funding Issues**

The committee recognized our graduate program's strengths and identified some important challenges related to funding. We appreciate the committee's suggestions regarding the distribution of mentoring responsibilities, the need to evaluate some of our course requirements, and the desirability of our ongoing efforts to focus on graduate funding in our advancement efforts.

We add one clarification to the report's description of the funding challenges. The report notes that our funding offers to incoming graduate students are not competitive with other programs, and suggests that we have, until recently, had growing problems attracting the best graduate students due to falling behind on recruitment packages. We believe the trend is more complicated. We have had growing quality in our applicant pools, and have begun competing more boldly with the very best programs for top students. The result is a changed environment that makes it difficult to pinpoint how much our anemic funding matters relative to other factors. We have certainly lost many admitted students to schools offering much better funding packages, but increasingly the prevailing schools have been much higher ranked programs. Importantly, we have also had growing success recruiting students who receive much better financial offers from other programs, particularly in key areas of cross-field strength like political economy and public law. The important bottom line, however, is that we have experienced gradual but steady improvement in the quality of incoming students. So while limited funding obviously hurts, it has not made it impossible to sustain an outstanding and successful program. Our ability to succeed despite limited funding is the result of a recruitment strategy that uses direct individual outreach from faculty and focuses on program strengths that appeal to prospective students: Our truly outstanding job placement record, strong graduate student camaraderie and morale, and high overall quality of life. We could, of course, do even better if we had more resources to offer students.

I make this clarification because it helps to explain our alarm about the impact of the very recent cuts in instructional funding cuts that are mentioned in the report. (This quarter, we had to deny funding to four advanced students who were making good progress in the program, and face even deeper cuts next year.) We believe that the improving caliber of our students reflects hard won improvements in the national reputation of our graduate program. We thus see the impact of these new cuts as potentially devastating, going well beyond the short-term impact on current students who go unfunded. The cuts are forcing us to consider broader changes in funding and admissions practices that put our national reputation at risk, creating costs that will remain long after the current funding crisis is over. Moreover, the inevitable impact of cuts on student morale will also make it much more difficult for us to continue competing on the cheap with better-

funded programs. Cuts to our graduate program will also palpably undermine both the capacity and quality of our undergraduate teaching.

More optimistically, the current crisis is forcing us to reevaluate many longstanding practices. We are searching for ways to streamline our program to help students move through more quickly. We are already identifying some changes that we believe will improve the program overall, including the committee's suggestion that we reevaluate course requirements. We are confident that we will eventually find a new funding equilibrium where we can run an excellent program on a relatively lean budget. But in the short term, the funding cuts create a disruptive transitional period that threatens significant and lasting reputational damage.

#### **4) Grants and Other Revenue Sources**

The committee correctly highlights declining intramural grants as a problematic trend in department finances, one linked to the challenges around graduate funding. The committee also offers some useful suggested incentives to encourage more grant related activity. We do have some incentives in place already, including merit criteria that recognize applications for grants and not just success. We still need to do better, and the current funding problems with our graduate program may help by providing additional incentives for grant activity in support of students. The committee also raises the issue of staff support for grant applications, and we are now working to gauge whether additional staff support could spur grant activity. What is clear now is that significant increases in grant activity would quickly exhaust our limited staff capacity. I will continue to work with College of Arts and Sciences administration and cognate units to understand how best to meet any identified staffing needs.

We also see considerable possibility for improving fundraising through outreach to alumni. We are now planning some alumni and community outreach events for next year. While the short term funding impact of such large net efforts is uncertain, broader outreach may serve as a longer-term foundation for more effective targeting of potential large donors. Such outreach will also help us to develop a better understanding of how our program serves our majors after graduation.

#### **5) Department Governance, Promotions, Diversity/Climate Issues.**

The committee reports that we have an unusually elaborate governance structure, and suggests that we consider eliminating some standing committees in order to reduce faculty service roles. We agree that the structure is elaborate and we also recognize that long-serving faculty have experienced an increase in service loads. However, we do not see an elaborate structure as a primary factor that adds to the service burden, especially relative to faculty downsizing. There may be some misunderstanding growing out of the confusing presentation of our elaborate "Committee Roster" in our self-study. Some of the extra "standing committees" that the report singles out are essentially subcommittees of other committees that meet just once per year to fulfill a single task. Those committees aim to divide labor and thus to reduce rather than add to service loads. Other complexities (e.g., splitting graduate admissions from the graduate program committee) aims to spread necessary work more evenly across faculty and to match service demands on committees with seasonal responsibilities to faculty teaching schedules. The role of Associate Chair has also been essential to making the demanding role of department chair manageable. Nevertheless, there is certainly room to revisit the committee structure and search for ways to

limit service loads by consolidation. There are also some committees that either need to be eliminated or repurposed, particularly the executive committee.

One especially valuable suggestion in the report is that we change the process for recommending when associate professors should undergo review for promotion to full professor. Beginning this Spring, all the full professors together will take part in that process, not just the four on the personnel committee.

The report also recommends that we hold more regular faculty meetings for deliberative discussion of departmental issues. We are not certain whether an interest in additional meetings was expressed by our faculty, nor are we certain that we understand the committee's concern that we allow our "enviable collegiality to be sustained partly through benign neglect of difficult topics". While we do not schedule meetings at regular intervals, we do have quite a few meetings, including nine faculty meetings scheduled this year. Our practice has been to organize meetings in response to needs (e.g., promotion or hiring) rather than regular calendar intervals. We also try to ensure attendance and engagement at meetings by combining general discussion items with compelling decisions requiring formal votes. I do, however, believe, that there is great value in having more regular topical discussion meetings for interested faculty, and plan to schedule discussions on topics like undergraduate teaching, graduate mentoring, and budgetary issues.

The committee report provides a thoughtful discussion of several issues related to equity, diversity, and climate issues in the department. The most significant and striking of these is our lack of female faculty at the rank of full professor. We agree that this is a serious issue, one that calls for a more general rethinking about how we mentor associate professors, how we communicate the standards for promotion, and how we structure decision making. The committee's careful consideration of this problem is much appreciated. We are also expecting that we can bring forward one and possibly two promotion cases this fall that will address this problem.

There are broader issues of climate and diversity in the department that we will work hard on going forward. We will be launching a new diversity committee next year, with representation from faculty, students, and staff. I intend to empower that committee to pursue a bold agenda. This move is not a response to any particular finding in the report or a broader perception that the department has unusual problems in this area. It is instead rooted in recognition that the challenge of maintaining an equitable and healthy climate can only be met through conscious and proactive measures rather than just by responding to problems that arise. The precise contours of our efforts in this area remain to be determined through the new committee's work. We are collectively committed to working hard on these issues, and believe that success in these efforts will be a primary driver of how our program is judged a decade from now during our next department review.

**Conclusion.** The review process has been a positive learning experience for our department due to the thoughtful efforts of the review committee. We believe we are a strong department that makes very efficient use of limited resources. The recommendations growing out of the committee report will position us well to meet some ongoing challenges and maintain excellence.