

Dean's Response

Political Science Program Review

April 26, 2017

I wish to thank the Program Review Team (Drs. Anne Hildreth and Adam Johnston) for their work in their site visit and evaluation report, as well as the Political Science faculty for their thorough self-study and response to the review team's report.

The review team's report struck an overall strongly positive note. They noted four essential strengths of the program – student centeredness, department leadership, recent curricular changes, and the department's relationship with the Walker Institute. As does the program in its response. I agree that these are all considerable strengths that the program deploys to the benefit of their students.

The report further identifies a number of “challenges and opportunities” faced by the program:

The future of the Walker Institute: As the program's response correctly notes, the Walker Institute is affiliated with the department, but is not a subunit of the department. Its director reports to the dean. The department certainly has a strong voice in the search underway for a new director of the Institute – the department chair is chair of the search committee, and another Political Science faculty member serves on that committee – but the selection of the director is not simply an internal matter for the Political Science program. However, I, who as dean will make the recommendation for the new director to the Provost, and the Walker Institute advisory board, which is represented on the search committee, are keenly aware of the importance of a vibrant relationship between the Institute and the Department.

Advising: Unlike the review team of 2012, this review team found that the existing division of labor, with the chair as lead advisor, is appropriate. The number of Political Science majors, while healthy, is not so great that it overwhelms the chair, who provides a consistent level of high-quality advising. Meanwhile, other faculty members provide advising relevant to career options (including pre-law) and their particular areas of specialization.

Assisting students toward timely graduation: The development of planning tools such as graduation maps and major pages will help in this regard, as does the judicious offering of independent study courses. I might add that the College's two full-time advisors offer assistance, especially with monitoring students' progress toward meeting all graduation requirements outside the major.

Assisting “struggling” students: I am pleased that the program agrees that this is an area where more progress can be made, and will discuss ways to do so.

More financial support for research/scholarship: There has also been some success in this arena, for example, the recent endowment of the Wheeler Pre-Law Lecture series. I am pleased as well that the program will explore the possibility of a program-level advisory council whose charge would, in part, be financial advancement. I might add that the College is initiating an Advisory Council aimed in part toward such advancement for the college. I plan to eventually have members on this body relating to each discipline in the college.

Expanding class offerings into the afternoon: This involves a nice balancing act between student demand (which is heavily in favor of morning and, to a lesser extent, evening classes) and the desire to so expand the schedule. The faculty favors such an effort, and, indeed, our upcoming three-semester sojourn in the old Science Lab Building will perforce provide such an experiment, since that building will have fewer classrooms in which to offer the schedule.

The review team's report provides three recommendations for WSU Political Science:

Fill the upcoming faculty vacancy with a specialist in Comparative Politics: The program faculty and I are in full accord with this recommendation.

Fill the Walker Institute Director vacancy with a political scientist who complements the current faculty: The Walker Institute position announcement lists an M.A. in Political Science or a related field as a minimum requirement, and a Ph.D. (again, in Political Science or a related field) as preferred. Complementarity with the Political Science faculty is a factor that both the search committee and I will pay close attention to.

Learning assessments that inform the faculty of the success of recent curricular changes: The current assessment system is found satisfactory by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, but there is always room for improvement. I am thus pleased to see the program's commitment to begin work in the fall on improvements to the assessment system.

Overall, the review team found the Political Science program to be a dynamic, student-centered program, with a highly-qualified faculty and strong leadership. I agree fully with this positive assessment.