2015-2016
Cyclical Program Review of Political Science

PROGRAMS:
Honours Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
Master of Applied Politics

Final Assessment Report

Submitted by: Dr. Richard Nemesvari, Dean, Faculty of Arts; Dr. Tamas Dobozy, Dean of Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; Dr. Kathryn Carter, Associate Vice-President: Teaching and Learning; Dr. Deborah MacLatchy, Provost and Vice-President: Academic
Date: August 22, 2016
PART ONE: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REVIEW DOCUMENTS
(SELF-STUDY, REVIEWERS’ REPORT, UNIT RESPONSE)

Self-Study

- The self-study describes the department’s transition from a purely disciplinary unit to one increasingly engaged interdisciplinary and policy related programs such as involvement with MIPP, the PhD in Global Governance, a Legal Studies Option and closer connections with North American Studies. The Self-Study preparation was coordinated by the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Debora VanNijnatten and included contributions from faculty, CAS and student representatives collected at a department retreat and at department meetings. The document responds to previous reviewer recommendations and contextualizes how the salient recommendations of the previous review have been adopted into the current program. The document asked reviewers to respond to questions around increasing the number of Honours BA majors, the interrelationships between interdisciplinary programs in the department, and the blend between core political theory and employment skills.

- The document articulates the program-level learning outcomes and describes the process by which they were developed. It outlines alignment with the Laurier’s Strategic Mandate Agreement and Academic Plan demonstrating such core principles as Civic Engagement, Integration, Global Citizenship, and Quantitative and Scientific Analysis. Degree Level Expectations are clearly articulated for both the graduate and undergraduate programs.

- Since the Political Science undergraduate program is not a direct entry program, admission requirements are set by the Faculty of Arts and the Admissions office. Admission requirements for the graduate program are rigorous and alternative requirements, such as previous work experience, are determined in consultation with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

- The curriculum draws primarily upon political science disciplinary practice, but the program is also responding to interdisciplinary currents and incorporating internationalization into the curriculum to provide insight into increasingly complex social and political dynamics. In first and second-year courses, small tutorial experiences augment the larger lecture. In senior years, high impact practices focus on collaborative assignments, diversity and global learning, undergraduate research, capstone projects and courses, as well as writing intensive courses. Faculty are encouraged to incorporate their own research into courses, are experimenting with “flipped” classroom pedagogy, and online courses. Over the past 5 years, there have been significant changes to the undergraduate program grouped into three clusters: integrating problem-based and applied components into existing courses; decoupling twinned courses, and strengthening linkages between Political Science and North American Studies. The graduate program was recently re-envisioned and revised to become a Master of Applied Politics degree.

- The document notes that there was a recent reduction of one support staff position which has impacted the department. Despite research funds being harder to secure than ever, faculty in the department
continue to be successful in obtaining grants and the department’s research productivity is high. The program’s undergraduate enrolments are steady and they hope to stabilize their graduate enrolment to 18-20 to students a year by 2017-2018.

- Teaching evaluations in the program are consistently in line with Faculty and University averages and alumni surveys reveal that the vast majority of students are satisfied or very satisfied with the Political Science program.

- Through curricular and pedagogical innovations, streamlining program progression, and regularly updating course content and creating new courses, the department has incorporated more applied and skills-based components across its curriculum at both the graduate and undergraduate level. The program will continue to assess and evaluate the impacts of the changes that have been implemented.

External Reviewers’ Report

Executive Summary

The Political Science Department at Laurier is impressive. The curriculum at the undergraduate level is clearly designed to help students achieve specific learning objectives and gain practical experience. At the graduate level, the newly created Masters in Applied Politics is a unique approach to providing students with practical skills that will enable them to succeed in a number of different career directions.

The faculty, staff and students are generally pleased with the programs and are very collegial. Indeed, in the Committee’s estimation this is a highly collegial department, reflecting a positive community spirit and confidence in its current leadership. The Department has and is pursuing an ambitious agenda to adapt to provincial and university-level changes.

The Department continues to benefit from its relationship with the Balsillie School, which not only gives faculty members considerable benefits but also integrates PhD students in the joint programme in Global Governance. With improvements in the governance structure at Balsillie, the relationship has improved as well.

The Department provides students with a solid intellectual foundation as well as practical experience in what is often an abstract discipline. It is emerging as a unique and desirable location for policy studies. As senior faculty members retire, the Department will need replacement hires to continue on its positive trajectory, and staffing needs must also be taken into consideration if the senior administration expects this Department to continue to make its impressive contribution to the overall development of Wilfred Laurier University.

List of Recommendations

1. Continue the practice of aligning undergraduate course content across courses. This is important for achieving learning outcomes and it is impressive that the department regularly engages in the practice now.
2. Continue to explore possibilities for community engagement in course assignments. Partnering with organizations that are looking for reports or analyses of different issues could fit into the existing curriculum and provide students with even more hands-on experience. This would further complement the strategic goal of experiential learning.

3. We recommend continuing with the Research Specialization Option as long as the numbers in PO478, the capstone course, warrant it.

4. Consider ways to reduce the administrative workload on department officers so that they can continue to be productive researchers. It is important however to continue the practise of ensuring that junior faculty members are not overburdened with administrative tasks as they seek to enhance their research portfolios.

5. The department would benefit from additional administrative assistance.

6. Continue the development of a Minor in Policy Studies (or, perhaps, a Minor in Public Policy Studies).

7. Consider a long-term strategy for online and hybrid course development.

8. Maintain the RSO as a means to ensure that Laurier graduates are of the highest quality.

9. In general, the emphasis on maintaining high standards for undergraduate students should be encouraged and not diluted in an effort to attract more students to the program.

10. Feedback from the community partners in experiential learning opportunities is vital to monitor students' progress in these areas and should be regularly obtained.

11. Investigate, with Senior Administration, possible avenues towards hiring at least a 0.5 (part-time) staff position.

12. Compile a 2-3 year hiring strategy that would replace recently retired faculty and think strategically about integrating teaching needs with research strengths.

13. Look into space-sharing arrangements with other departments to facilitate social meetings, and longer-term planning about study space for students on campus. Consider expanding CAS shared office time to 2.5 hours from 1.5 hours a week.

14. Consider putting in place a strategic plan to hire a CRC (Tier I or II) in the next several years.

15. Consider distribution of research areas when recruiting graduate students to help with supervision equity.

16. Encourage MA students to pursue the Journal Article Option.

17. Explore ways to facilitate greater more experiential learning opportunities through internships, etc.

18. The Department has already undertaken many changes in the last two years in order to align itself with the University’s Strategic Mandate for experiential learning. We very much commend these initiatives and the willingness of the faculty to innovate and change their curriculum.
Unit Response

The unit response was authored by the Chair of Political Science and provides responses to the recommendations related to each section of the self-study. There were no clarifications or corrections to the External Reviewers’ Report noted.

The Department responded to each recommendation and identified which ones they agreed to, what steps had already been taken toward their implantation, and what further action would be taken in the future. Recommendations that had already been completed (e.g. creation of a Minor in Public Policy) were noted, as with those recommendations that are outside the scope of the Department (e.g. entrance averages).

Political Science acknowledges that they have just completed several years of curricular revisions and administrative changes, and that they are looking forward to assessing the success of these efforts. The challenge of integrating the new cohort of Sussex LLB + Political Science BA students into departmental programming is also noted.

B) IDENTIFICATION OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS

The following departmental strengths are evident from both the self-study and the External Reviewers’ Report:

1. The Department’s academic goals and learning outcomes align directly with the 2015-2020 Strategic Academic Plan.

2. The Department is clearly committed to the development of experiential learning, as shown by the creation of such opportunities for students as the Certificate in Practical Politics and the Masters in Applied Politics, an innovative program that demonstrates the department’s forward thinking in matters of graduate education. This emphasis is well-aligned with the university’s Strategic Academic Plan.

3. Innovative initiatives such as the Legal Studies/Sussex Law program attract students and raise the profile of both the Department and the Faculties of Arts and Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

4. The Master of Applied Politics program provides significant opportunities for students to develop professional skills in tandem with research expertise.

5. The Department’s Practitioner in Residence program is both innovative and effective.

C) OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT

1. The Department should continue its consideration of developing on-line course offerings and establish a strategic approach to deciding which classes may most successfully be offered through this mode of delivery.
2. In conjunction with the Faculty of Arts as a whole, strategies for increasing rates of program completion should be developed.

3. The department should remain in regular consultation with the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies on the matter of student recruitment and possibilities for expanding the existing cohort of Masters’ students.

D) PRIORITIZATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS APPROVED FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Several of the External Reviewers’ recommendations (Recommendations #5, #11, #12, #14) entail resource allocations that cannot be addressed outside of the wider context of the budgetary constraints in the Faculty of Arts, and in the university as a whole. They are therefore not included in the prioritization list, since they may not be implemented outside of the budget process. It should also be noted that for recommendation #14: Consider putting in place a strategic plan to hire a CRC (Tier I or II) in the next several years, that the CRC should align with the department’s strategy vis-à-vis “applied politics” at the graduate level, so that his/her presence can enhance the existing teaching and research resources for graduate students, as well as contributing to recruitment.

In regard to Recommendation #9: In general, the emphasis on maintaining high standards for undergraduate students should be encouraged and not diluted in an effort to attract more students to the program, it should be noted (as the Unit response also acknowledges) that recruitment decisions do not take place on the departmental level, and therefore this recommendation is not prioritized.

In regard to Recommendation #4: Consider ways to reduce the administrative workload on department officers so that they can continue to be productive researchers. It is important however to continue the practise of ensuring that junior faculty members are not overburdened with administrative tasks as they seek to enhance their research profiles, it should be noted that service contributions (“administrative tasks”) at both the Departmental and University level are crucial to maintaining the institution’s continuing success, and that service is a specified component of consideration for tenure and promotion in the Collective Agreement. Although no faculty member should be “overburdened,” legitimate service should not be evaded in order to “enhance...research profiles.”

In regard to Recommendation #13: Look into space-sharing arrangements with other departments to facilitate social meetings, and longer-term planning about study space for students on campus, the department should encourage graduate students to make use of the Graduate Commons in the Library, which include study, meeting and social space reserved exclusively for Laurier graduate students.

Of the 19 recommendations listed in the Reviewers’ Report, the following should be prioritized:

Recommendations #2, #10, #17, and #18: Continue to explore possibilities for community engagement in course assignments; Feedback from the community partners in experiential learning opportunities is vital to students’ progress and should be regularly obtained; Explore ways to facilitate greater more experiential learning opportunities; [C]onsider practical research projects which are partnered with
community service learning. All four of these recommendations encourage the Department to continue and improve its engagement with experiential learning, which is an important pillar of the university’s Strategic Academic Plan. In each of the Unit responses the Department agrees that it will maintain its development in this direction at both the undergraduate and graduate level. We would note that Political Science has already demonstrated its strong commitment to meeting this pillar of the Strategic Academic Plan, and there is little doubt that it will persist in doing so. At the graduate level, this emphasis is a recent development and should be pursued with a view to differentiating the Masters in Applied Politics from other programs internal to Laurier, particularly those offered through the joint Laurier and Balsillie School programs, in order to attract the highest quality and greatest number of graduate student applicants. It would also be useful to further assess the ways in which skills acquired in the classroom can be usefully applied to the variety of workplace contexts in which graduate students are place to further refine the integration of coursework with work placements in order to achieve learning outcomes.

Recommendations #1, #3, #6, #8: Continue the practice of aligning undergraduate course content across courses; Continue the Research Specialization Option as long as the numbers in PO478 warrant it; Continue the development of a Minor in Policy Studies (or, perhaps, a Minor in Public Policy Studies; Maintain the RSO as a means to ensure that Laurier graduates are of the highest quality: All four of these recommendations are concerned with curriculum development, and two of them specifically address the Research Specialization Option. In each case the Department has already moved to address the issues raised, and has revised curriculum elements in place for the 2016-2017 academic year. These recommendations do not need to be prioritized so much as they should be tracked to ascertain if any further adjustments are required, and to ensure that they are delivering the expected outcomes to students.

Recommendation #7: Consider a long-term strategy for online and hybrid course development: The Department agrees with this recommendation and is proceeding with the development of four additional online courses for 2016-2017. It also intends to discuss and implement a broader strategy that will allow for future expansion into different modes of course delivery. Such a strategy will, no doubt, be aligned with future Faculty of Arts initiatives in online and blended delivery of its offerings.

Recommendation #15: Consider distribution of research areas when recruiting graduate students to help with supervision equity. This is true not only for "equity" but also in terms of the student experience in the program as a whole, and thus the department’s appeal for future applicants. Faculty should be encouraged to lend their research expertise as fully as possible to the department and graduate student cohort in order to maximize the supervisory experience—in terms of time, instruction, and professionalization—for each individual student. Faculty should be encouraged to regularly revisit how their research areas fit with the graduate priorities of the department as a whole.
SIGNATURES

Dr. Richard Nemesvari

Dr. Tamas Dobozy

Dr. Kathryn Carter

Dr. Deborah MacLatchy
## PART TWO: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation to be Implemented</th>
<th>Responsibility for Implementation</th>
<th>Anticipated Completion Date</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations #2, #10, #17, #18 (all related to experiential learning):</td>
<td>Department and Department Chair</td>
<td>Ongoing, but additional examples of Experiential Learning opportunities demonstrated by Jan. 2018</td>
<td>Recommendations to be pursued in conjunction with wider FoA commitment to Strategic Academic Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  Recommendation #2: Continue to explore possibilities for community engagement in course assignments. Partnering with organizations that are looking for reports or analyses of different issues could fit into the existing curriculum and provide students with even more hands-on experience. This would further complement the strategic goal of experiential learning.

  Recommendation #10: Feedback from the community partners in experiential learning opportunities is vital to monitor students’ progress in these areas and should be regularly obtained.

  Recommendation: #17: Explore ways to facilitate greater more experiential learning opportunities through internships, etc.

  Recommendation #18: The Department has already undertaken many changes in the last two years in order to align itself with the University’s Strategic Mandate for experiential learning. We very much commend these initiatives and the willingness of the faculty to innovate
and change their curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations #1, #3, #6, #8 (all related to curriculum):</th>
<th>Department and Department Chair</th>
<th>Report on outcomes of curriculum revisions by Sept. 2017</th>
<th>Recommendations have been implemented – provide follow-up on immediate impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #1: Continue the practice of aligning undergraduate course content across courses. This is important for achieving learning outcomes and it is impressive that the department regularly engages in the practice now.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #3: We recommend continuing with the Research Specialization Option as long as the numbers in PO478, the capstone course, warrant it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #6: Continue the development of a Minor in Policy Studies (or, perhaps, a Minor in Public Policy Studies).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation #8: Maintain the RSO as a means to ensure that Laurier graduates are of the highest quality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation #7: Consider a long-term strategy for online and hybrid course development</strong></td>
<td>Department and Department Chair</td>
<td>Ongoing, but report on blended and/or on-line course development by Jan. 2018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation #15: Consider distribution of research areas when recruiting graduate students to help with supervision equity</strong></td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Ongoing, update to be provided in implementation report due June 2017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>