



Political Science Program Review 2021-22

Closing MOU

Date: September 13, 2022

Overview

Degree/Certificate Programs Reviewed:	Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs Bachelor of Arts in Political Science Bachelor of Arts in Political Science/Secondary Education Accelerated Bachelor of the Arts/Master of Arts Political Science Master of Arts in Political Science Master of Public Administration Ph.D. in Political Science
Department Chair & Dean:	Carolyn Warner, Chair; Casilde Isabelli, Interim Dean
External Reviewers & Affiliation:	Dr. Susan Scarrow, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, University of Houston Dr. Glen Krutz, Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, Oklahoma State University [as of July 2022, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Colorado Boulder]
Date of External Visit:	March 20 - 23, 2022

Review Process Summary

Political Science BA: Political science majors learn how to understand and analyze the ideologies, institutions and social forces that shape our lives. Through courses in American politics, comparative politics, political theory, international relations, public policy and administration, students come to develop both a deep knowledge of the world around them and the critical thinking, writing and analytical skills that will prepare them for productive careers after college. Students have opportunities to apply and enhance their knowledge and skills through innovative projects in classes and through internships with public organizations and legislatures.

International Affairs BA: The International Affairs program provides opportunities for students to explore diverse course options throughout the University and develop an area of expertise relating to your interests. International affairs students interested in environmental studies, geography, business, journalism, literature, economics or regional studies, to name a few, are encouraged to incorporate relevant coursework in these areas into their degree plans.

Political Science MA: This program offers students an opportunity for advanced, specialized courses in the discipline of political science, leading to a graduate degree. It also prepares students for additional graduate work leading to a doctoral degree and a career as a political scientist. Political Science Masters students the opportunity to prepare for a career in teaching, politics, public service

and government or to complement their present careers. They also support University-based research involving issues of politics and public policy. The courses in political science cover a full range of the discipline, both in terms of substance and methodology. Courses in research methods provide the skills necessary for sophisticated analysis of political processes, institutions and policies. More specialized interests are developed through independent research courses and projects tackled by students.

Master of Public Administration (MPA): The MPA program is a non-thesis degree designed to provide students with competency in both public administration and public policy formation and analysis. The program is designed to prepare students for careers in public administration and public policy analysis and to improve managerial competence of persons who are typically already in public service positions. This training is accomplished through the advanced study of administrative processes and problems, and through an increased understanding of policy issues and development of research skills.

Political Science PhD: The PhD program develops students' research skills through the advanced study of research design and methodology, political processes and problems, and policy issues; prepares individuals for careers in research and teaching institutions of higher education, public administration, and public policy; and supports university-based research involving issues of politics and public policy. Students are expected to have a major and minor field in the areas the department offers as specializations, including American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Public Administration, and Public Policy and conduct original, rigorous research within the field. They have opportunities to conduct research and co-author with faculty as part of their training.

Review Process and Criteria

The Political Science program was scheduled for regular program review as mandated by the Board of Regents and University policy. A self-study document for the department and its programs was developed by the department faculty and completed in the Fall of 2021 for Political Science programs. These respective reports were provided to the reviewers before they conducted an in-person visit on March 21 -22, 2022. The external reviewers reviewed the program and met with relevant faculty, staff, students and administrators to determine the department's accomplishments, examine strengths and weaknesses, and identify opportunities as it plans for the future. A final report was issued by the review team shortly after the review visit. In accordance with institution practice, responses to the review were solicited from the department and the dean. A final meeting took place on September 13, 2022. This document represents the final MOU of recommendations and findings from the review.

Signatures

Executive Vice President &
Provost:

Jeffrey S. Thompson

Date: _____

Vice Provost, Undergraduate
Education:

David Shintani

Date: _____

Date: _____

Vice Provost, Graduate Education
& Dean, Graduate School

Markus Kemmelmeier

Interim Dean, College of Liberal
Arts

Casilde Isabelli

Date: _____

Chair, Department Political
Science

Carolyn Warner

Date: _____

Major Findings and Conclusions

The overall impression of the external review team was of a good department with much upside potential. The department benefits from good leadership and having faculty who seem refreshingly willing to work as a team to pitch in to make things work. Faculty members are engaged with research at a level appropriate for an R1 university, as evidenced by recent publications in top journals and presses, and by funded research awards. The department seems to be offering excellent education at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and the payoff is evident both in the student success numbers, and in the anecdotal evidence of student success. On the other hand, the reviewers found the department to be under considerable strain due to recent faculty losses, and due to the original under-funding of the doctoral program.

- **Undergraduate Enrollment and Recruitment:** The department's two undergraduate programs both have healthy enrollments averaging a combined annual headcount of around 470 students. To realize further growth, the department, if it ever is re-staffed to sufficient faculty numbers, would need to develop strategies to recruit new freshmen from high school populations. Presently, the faculty are stretched too thinly in their current teaching, research and service obligations to be able to have time to engage in K-12 recruiting activities. They would also need helpful information on what works best and how to get access to K-12 students, from the College and from the Office of Prospective Students.
- **Undergraduate Curriculum:** The Political Science (PS) BA and International Affairs (IA) BA programs have been structured to provide students with a high degree of freedom create academic plans that address their specific interests. To enhance student enthusiasm for these programs, the reviewers felt that the department could update names of courses and required fields to better convey the relevance of the content. The reviewers also felt that the department should develop a research methods course for the PS BA program that better addresses the needs of PS professionals. This is only feasible if faculty numbers increase, and that depends on decisions by the Provost and Dean. Currently, PS BA students take research methods courses taught from other departments, in addition to our PSC332 Policy Analysis course. One concern conveyed by the reviewers was that the department participated in an unusually large number of minors, including the Core Humanities obligation. They suggest that the department and college should be cautious about adding more minors, and should perhaps think about only adding further minors if they eliminate some of the existing ones. One of the minors and one of the certificates that the department participates in are part of University initiatives.

- **Undergraduate Advising:** Per College of Liberal Arts policy, advising is currently divided between college-level advisors, who have contact with students in the first year, and a faculty advisor, who advise students in the remainder of the student's undergraduate career until students do graduate checks. This burden has had to be filled by regular tenure/tenure track faculty and one 20 hour/week GA. In AY 2022-23, PSC major and minor advising was, per special arrangement agreed upon by the former Dean, shifted to the College advisors. Advising for International Affairs still falls on one faculty member. The reviewers were concerned that having a faculty member so deeply involved advising, may not be the best use of the department highly strained faculty resources and the department wholeheartedly agrees. The Chair has tried to get faculty and GA advising shifted onto professional advisors since she arrived at UNR in 2019.
- **Master of Public Administration:** The MPA program, a once very successful program, has been allowed by the University to decline in terms of faculty support and student numbers. Given the importance of MPA majors as alumni who connect the university with local, state and national government, and given that there is likely to be steady demand for this degree from a university that is so close to the state capitol, it seems highly likely that modest investment in this program could yield high dividends in terms of enrollment and community engagement. Due to the unfilled vacancies in Public Administration faculty in recent years, Political Science faculty from other fields have been advising students, and the Department has had to hire five adjuncts to teach MPA students, just so that they can complete their studies. This shows great team-spirit on the part of the faculty, but it is a sub-optimal practice, and is not sustainable, especially if program growth is desired.
- **Political Science MA/PhD Program:** The department aims to offer a "full service" doctoral program, potentially admitting students to study in most of the traditional political science sub-fields. Unfortunately, the program and its resources are limited in comparison to those at peer institutions. Because the only way to successfully recruit students to a nationally-recognized PhD program is to offer full funding to those admitted, the typical size of the Political Science doctoral student total cohort of fully funded students is limited to around ten; meaning annual admissions cohorts have to be extremely small (1-2) or have a "boom/bust" character. Unfortunately, this falls below critical student enrollment needed for a thriving Political Science PhD program. With such a small number of students, it is difficult to provide students with the educational and research opportunities needed to attract top students to UNR.
- **Faculty:** With mostly assistant and associate professors (but one in phase-in retirement) and just two Full Professors, one of those about to retire, it is overall a young and developing faculty worthy of investment and support by the University. Growing the number of faculty lines back to pre-pandemic numbers is essential in terms of having more faculty to shoulder collective programmatic burdens, while also enabling each to engage in R1 level research productivity, including getting grants, and in teaching and service. Growing faculty lines back to pre-pandemic numbers (to 19) also is essential to the department being able to sustain its degree programs and research and service obligations, and eventually flourish. However, the current number of faculty is too small to sustain what the department as a whole is doing, and a lack of senior faculty is placing added program-leadership responsibilities on mid-career and junior faculty.

Based on these observations, the reviewers made the following recommendations:

- 1) The department should recoup three of its lost faculty lines for searches in the 2022-23 academic year. A senior assistant or associate professor in public administration or policy should definitely be a priority to help shore up that supply of graduate students. This faculty member could also potentially take over the MPA advisement duties from the graduate director. A second line in PA/policy would also be advised. Finally, based on interest expressed in the self-study as well as likely demand from an increase in interest in domestic politics in recent years, another faculty line in American politics would be advised. After that initial year of hiring, the college and university should add another line each of the next three years, for a total of six new faculty. In keeping with our observation that the department has great potential to increase its major base by putting more emphasis on pre-law, we would recommend that one of these next hires be in the area of public law.
- 2) The number of allocated GTA lines from the Graduate School should be doubled from 10 to 20. The Ph.D. program has nice demand (as evidenced by the number of applications). To create more of a cohort (and to decrease the likelihood of periodic troughs in enrollment), more students are needed each year. Such growth will add to the life of the department and likely lead to increased research capability of the department faculty.
- 3) The department should be allocated a professional academic advisor, such that the faculty member and GTA currently providing advisement may return more fully to their instructional and scholarly pursuits.
- 4) The university (VPRI) should invest in the desired survey and experimental research lab. Such labs cost a mere fraction of a wet lab and the faculty who have this interest are attracting grants already. This project would be a worthy investment that would support faculty and student research.

Next Steps for this Program/Department (topics will vary)

- The Political Science Department is encouraged to participate in activities to attract prospective students to Political Science undergraduate degree programs. A few suggested engagement activities include: 1) as their webpage and NV FIT participation does, marketing the Political Science as an excellent pre-law major; 2) continue participation in the teaching of Introductory Political Science dual enrollment courses in Clark County and expand to Washoe County High Schools when the Provost's office initiates that (and when it makes resources available to hire faculty to run that program).
- The Department will rationalize the International Affairs major so it is easier for undergraduates to navigate and will modernize it so it is more appealing to contemporary students.
- The department has identified in the Program Review and in multiple hiring requests and justifications submitted as required by Dean and Provost since April of 2020, and in other reports, factors that negatively impact student retention and progression to degree completion for all degree levels, the biggest one being the lack of faculty due to unfilled vacancies. The should also consider the reviewers' recommendations to eliminate minors with low enrollments or that have courses that cannot be regularly scheduled due to limited instructor availability.
- The department will work with the College of Liberal Arts professional advising staff to transition towards an advising model where the college advisors do 100% of the undergraduate advising. This will allow faculty more time to focus on instruction and their scholarly activity.
- Growth of the Political Science graduate programs, including restaffing of faculty lines in key areas that the department and external reviewers already have identified, is critical to the survival of the graduate programs. Therefore the department chair and graduate program directors will work closely with the

College and Graduate School Deans to develop strategies to generate additional graduate assistantships for the department for the PhD program.

- The department chair has identified in the Program Review and in multiple hiring requests and justifications submitted as required by Dean and Provost since April of 2020, and in multiple discussions with the previous Dean and in discussions with the Interim Dean, critical curricular and programmatic deficiencies and prioritized the recruitment of new faculty who can help address those deficiencies. The department chair has fully agreed with the reviewer’s recommendations, and agrees that those recommendations should be central to these discussions and position allocations.

Vital Statistics on NSHE Reports

Number of students with declared major in the program area:

2021-22	BA International Affairs	121
	BA Political Science	334
	MPA Public Administration	33
	MA Political Science	5
	PhD Political Science	17

Number of graduates from the program for the following years:

2019-20	BA International Affairs	41
	BA Political Science	80
	MPA Public Administration	7
	MA Political Science	2
	PhD Political Science	1
2020-21	BA International Affairs	49
	BA Political Science	101
	MPA Public Administration	4
	MA Political Science	1
	PhD Political Science	4
2021-22	BA International Affairs	35
	BA Political Science	87
	MPA Public Administration	10
	MA Political Science	0
	PhD Political Science	0

Program-level graduation rate using first-time, full-time, degree-seeking cohort at 150 percent completion time:

2019-20	BA International Affairs	57.7%, n=26
	BA Political Science	81.6%, n=38
	MPA Public Administration	100%, n=5
	MA Political Science	0%, n=1
	PhD Political Science	75%, n=4
2020-21	BA International Affairs	80.0%, n=30
	BA Political Science	67.6%, n=68
	MPA Public Administration	100%, n=4

	MA Political Science	33.3%, n=3
	PhD Political Science	0%, n=1
2021-22	BA International Affairs	76.7%, n=30
	BA Political Science	61.1%, n=54
	MPA Public Administration	83.3%, n=6
	MA Political Science	0%, n=1
	PhD Political Science	0%, n=1
Headcount of students enrolled in any course related to the program (duplicated):		
2021-22	BA International Affairs	26
	BA Political Science	3002
	MPA Public Administration	205
	MA Political Science	205
	PhD Political Science	205